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LITTLE FRENCH MASTERPIECES

Masterpieces of Literature

Guy de Maupassant

Translated by

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With an Introduction by

Arthur Symons

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1907

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The Knickerbocker Press, New York

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Introduction

Guy de Maupassant

(1850–1893)

I

MAUPASSANT in his work gives us the will to live, and with him it is the will of the body to be always happy, always conscious of happiness, not too conscious of itself; the body's desire of light, heat, comfort, the pleasure of all the senses, and sound sleep without dreams. His work is the confession of the average sensual man, in whom an extravagance of health turns to fever, that there is something in the world, or not in it, which sets a term to enjoyment even while one has both will and strength to enjoy. Here is one of the most intimate of his confessions: "How gladly, at times, I would think no

more, feel no more, live the life of a brute, in a warm, bright country, in a yellow country, without crude and brutal verdure, in one of those Eastern countries in which one falls asleep without sadness, awakens without concern, is active and has no cares, loves and has no distress, and is scarcely aware that one is going on living!" It is in *On the Water* (*Sur l'Eau*) that he says this, the book in which he has "thought simply," and written down his thoughts as they came to him. It is love of life which drives him to this fear even of living, this desire of a vegetable warmth and growth, which seems to promise continuance. Goncourt notes in his *Journal,* in 1889, how Mirbeau "speaks curiously of the fear of death which haunts Maupassant, and which is the cause of his life of perpetual wandering over land and sea, in the effort to escape from that fixed idea." In *On the Water* he speaks, in terrified words, of this fear of death, this fear of an invisible monster, hidden in some corner, spying on

men's lives, and breathing a slow pestilence upon them. The soul hardly comes at all into this hatred of the earth on which men suffer so much before dying; it is the body which cries out against age, wrinkles, and the sure tardiness of decay. It is the body which will not be satisfied with what it can gather to itself under the sun, nor with any of the fruits of the earth into which it is to relapse, in the end.

Maupassant loved and hated life, and he hated it because he loved it. Tolstoi has pointed out how he becomes unconsciously a moralist by the mere force and clear-sightedness of his talent, his fidelity to what he has seen and to what he has felt. Caring for nothing in the world so much as for women, setting the monotonous and various drama of sex in motion through all his stories, he comes in the end to find all this amusing and absorbing comedy turning tragic. "He would have exalted love, but the more he knew it the more he cursed it." He cannot endure soli-

tude, and he finds only a more ignoble solitude where it has been his pleasure to seek distraction. "I was at home, and alone, and I felt that if I remained there I should fall into a horrible fit of melancholy, the sort of melancholy that must drive men to suicide if it returns too often." That is how he presents to us the state of mind of the man who is going out to "a night of pleasure"; and, at the end of that typical story, *The Closet* (*L'Armoire*), we see the man, overcome by horror and pity, hurrying home in the middle of the night, that he may escape from a more poignant sense of the wretchedness of things.

Maupassant saw life with his senses, and he reflected on it in a purely animal revolt, the recoil of the hurt animal. His observation is not, as it has been hastily assumed to be, cold; it is as superficially emotional as that of the average sensual man, and its cynicism is only another, not less superficial, kind of feeling. He saw life in all its details, and his soul was entangled in the details. He saw it

without order, without recompense, without pity; he saw too clearly to be duped by appearances, and too narrowly to distinguish any light beyond what seemed to him the enclosing bounds of darkness. And so he settled down, with a kind of violent indifference, which was almost despair, to live his life and to accomplish his task. Goncourt reports a conversation in which Céard "declares that, in him, literature was a matter wholly of instinct, not of reflection ; and affirms that, of all the men whom he has known, he was the most absolutely indifferent to everything, and that, at the very moment when he seemed most keenly set on a thing, he was already aloof from it." In ten years he wrote thirty volumes; he wrote well or ill, but he wrote always, not for love of art nor for love of money, but out of the need of his organism to spend its force after its kind, after all kinds.

In that famous chapter on the novel, which Maupassant put as a preface to *Peter and John* (*Pierre et Jean*), he summarises for us

those counsels of Flaubert under which he worked for seven years, before the publication of *Tallow-Ball* (*Boule de Suif*), in *The Soirées of Médan* (*Les Soirées de Médan*) of 1880, presented him to the public as a finished artist. "'Talent is a long patience.' The thing is, to look at what one wishes to express long enough and carefully enough to discover in it an aspect which no one has ever seen or said. In everything there is something undiscovered, because we are only accustomed to use our eyes with the recollection of what people have thought before us about the thing at which we are looking. There is an unknown quantity in the smallest thing. Find it." This unknown quantity in familiar things Maupassant knew how to find. He sought for it chiefly in that part of human nature which interested him most and which was most familiar to him. Being professedly not a psychologist, being content to leave the soul out of the question, he found that the animal passions were at the

root of our nature, that they gave rise to the most vivid and interesting kinds of action, and he persisted in rendering mainly the animal side of life. Probably no writer has ever done so more convincingly, with a more thorough knowledge of his subject, and a more perfect mastery of his knowledge. At his best he gives us, as in *A Life* (*Une Vie*), "l'humble vérité," or in *Little Roque* (*La Petite Roque*), the horrible truth, or, in *The Horla* (*Le Horla*), of 1887, the truth which destroys. It was the fear of death that wrung imagination out of him: *The Horla,* the invisible spectre of the mind. *The Horla* is the soul of the materialist, vindicating itself against the self-confidence of the body.

II

EVERYTHING which Maupassant wrote is interesting, it is more exclusively and merely interesting than the work of any writer of fiction who has been called great,

it is too exclusively and merely interesting to be really great work. Really great work, in fiction as in every other form of art, requires too close and too constant an attention to be quite easy reading. When we read Balzac we seem to have been plunged suddenly into the midst of so great a turbulence of life that the effort to absorb this new, irresistible, hurrying, and mysterious world makes us pause; we try to withdraw into ourselves, as one might step aside into a doorway out of a great crowd, in the streets of a city. We look up from the page, we half-close the book, that we may think a little, that we may rest from this fatiguing demand on all our faculties. When we read Flaubert, we are delightfully delayed by the completeness and the beauty of every detail; we linger over this prose as we linger over verse. When we read Mérimée, even, in those stories which may be so well compared with Maupassant's for their economy and precision of effect, we are conscious of some hard,

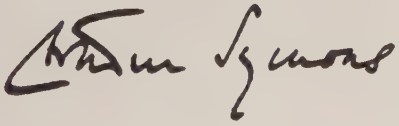
intellectual quality which takes hold of us, not only through the mere events of the story. But we read Maupassant for nothing but the story; we read him hurriedly, without lifting our eyes from the page; we are only anxious to get to the end, to see what happens. One should never read stories merely for the story. However absorbing may be the interest of plot, of the working out of a given situation, the plot and the situation should never be taken as more than the means to an end. In great art they are never more than the means to an end, to the interpretation, the new creation, of life; and no great artist allows himself to become so amusing, in his treatment of what is not essential, as to withdraw the attention of the reader from what is essential. That is why no great writer has ever been immediately popular. The books that pass away are the books that have too easily, too feverishly, interested a generation.

Maupassant is the best of the popular novelists, of the novelists who have not had to

wait for admiration. His appeal is genuine, and his skill, of its kind, incontestable. He attracts, as certain men do, by a warm and blunt plausibility. He is so frank, and seems so broad; and is so skillful, and seems so living. All the exterior heat of life is in his work; and this exterior heat gives a more immediate illusion of what we call real life than the profound inner vitality of, let us say, Hawthorne. He comes to us, saying impressively: "Certain meetings, certain inexplicable combinations of things, contain undoubtedly, however insignificant they may seem to be, a larger quantity of the secret quintessence of life than that dispersed in the ordinary course of events." He promises us this secret quintessence of life; and he tells us anecdote after anecdote, full of moving facts, and the obvious emotion of every fact. He is eager and unabashed, and he assures us: this is life, and these amusing and horrible and ordinary things are the things that really happen.

He assures us: "Blind and intoxicated with foolish pride must he be who believes himself more than one animal a little better than the others." And the others? "I seem to see in them the horror of their souls, as one sees a monstrous fœtus in spirits of wine, in a glass jar." And his scornful conclusion is: "Happy are they whom life satisfies, who can amuse themselves, and be content . . . Happy are they who have not discovered, with a vast disgust, that nothing changes, that nothing passes, and that all things are a weariness."

Is that a philosophy or is it an outcry? Is it not the unprofitable anger of the craftsman with his material? Is it not the helpless anger of the child with the toys which he has broken?



The Horla

The Horla

May 8th.—What a beautiful day! I passed the whole morning lying on the grass in front of my house, under the huge plane-tree, which covers it, shelters it, shades it in every part. I love this region, and I love to live here because my roots are here, those deep and delicate roots which attach a man to the place where his ancestors were born and died, which attach him to what people think there and what they eat, to their customs, as well as to their food, to the local peculiarities of speech, to the inflections of the peasants, to the odours of the soil, of the villages, and of the very air.

I love my house, in which I grew to manhood. From my windows I can see the Seine flowing along by my garden, beyond the road, almost on my premises; the broad and noble Seine, which goes from Rouen to Havre, covered with passing boats.

Yonder, at the left, lies Rouen, the great city with blue roofs, beneath the multitude of pointed Gothic steeples. They are innumerable, some slender, some massive; and, rising above them all, the bronze arrow of the cathedral filled with bells which peal in the blue air on a fine morning, sending to my ears their mellow, distant lin-lan-lone, their brazen melody, which the breeze brings to me, sometimes louder and sometimes fainter, as the wind rises or falls.

How pleasant it was this morning!

About eleven o'clock a long procession of vessels, drawn by a tug the size of a fly, which puffed painfully and vomited dense smoke, passed before my gate.

After two English schooners, whose red flags waved against the sky, came a superb Brazilian three-masted vessel, white as snow, wonderfully clean and glistening. I saluted her, I do not know why, the sight of her gave me so much pleasure.

May 12th.—I have had a touch of fever for

several days; I feel ill, or rather I feel depressed.

What is the source of these mysterious influences which transform our happiness and confidence into distress? One would say that the air, the invisible air, is full of unrecognisable powers, whose mysterious proximity affects us. I wake in the morning, in a light-hearted mood, with my throat itching to sing. Why? I go down to the stream, and of a sudden, after a short walk, I return home in dire distress, as if some calamity were awaiting me at my house. Why? Is it a cold shiver, which, grazing my skin, has set my nerves in motion and cast a shadow on my mind? Is it the shape of the clouds, or the colour of the day, the ever-changing hue of things, which, passing before my eyes, has disarranged my thoughts? Does any one know? Everything that surrounds us, everything that we see without looking at it, everything that we brush against without knowing it, everything that we touch without feeling

it, everything that we meet without recognising it, has swift, astounding, incomprehensible effects upon us, upon our organs, and, through them, upon our ideas.

How profound is this mystery of the invisible! We cannot sound it with our paltry senses, with our eyes which can distinguish neither the too small nor the too large, neither the too near nor the too distant, neither the inhabitants of a planet nor the inhabitants of a drop of water; with our ears, which mislead us, for they transmit the vibrations of the air to us in resonant notes. They are fairies who perform the miracle of transforming motion into sound, and by that metamorphosis give birth to music, which makes the mute processes of nature vocal. With our sense of smell, weaker than a dog's; with our taste, which can hardly distinguish the age of a wine!

Ah! if we had other organs which might perform other miracles in our favour, how many things we could still discover about us!

May 16th.—I am ill, beyond question. And

The Horla

I was so well last month! I have a fever, a violent fever—or rather a feverish prostration, which makes my mind as ill as my body. I have all the time the horrible sensation of impending danger, the apprehension of approaching disaster or death, the presentiment of evil which is doubtless the first symptom of a disease still undeclared, germinating in the blood and the flesh.

May 18th.—I have consulted my physician, for I am unable to sleep. He found my pulse accelerated, my eyes dilated, my nerves on edge, but no alarming symptoms. I am to take shower-baths and bromide of potassium.

May 25th.—No change. Really, I am in a strange state. As night draws near, an incomprehensible restlessness steals over me, as if the darkness concealed some terrible peril. I dine hastily, then try to read; but I cannot understand the words; I can barely distinguish the letters. Then I pace my salon, to and fro, oppressed by a vague and irresistible dread, the dread of sleep and of my bed.

About two o'clock I go up to my room. Once inside, I give the key a double turn and shoot the bolts. I am afraid—of what? I never feared anything before. I open my closets, I look under my bed, I listen, listen—for what? Is it not strange that a mere indisposition, some disturbance of the circulation perhaps, the irritation of a tiny nerve, a little congestion, the slightest hesitation in the imperfect and delicate operation of our machinery of living, can suddenly transform the most jovial of men into a victim of melancholia, and the bravest into a coward? Then I go to bed and await sleep as one would await the executioner. I await it with a horror of its coming; and my heart beats fast, and my legs tremble, and my whole body shivers under the warm bedclothes, until the moment when I suddenly fall into slumber, as one would fall into a pool of stagnant water, to drown one's self. I do not, as I used, feel it stealing over me, that treacherous sleep, which lies hidden close by me, watching me, ready to

seize me by the head, to close my eyes, to annihilate me.

I sleep—a long while—two or three hours; then a dream—no, a nightmare—clutches me. I feel that I am in bed and asleep. I feel it and see it; and I feel also that some one approaches me, looks at me, touches me, climbs on my bed, kneels on my chest, takes my neck in his hands, and squeezes, squeezes with all his strength, to strangle me.

I struggle, fettered by that horrible powerlessness which paralyses us in dreams; I try to shriek—I cannot; I try to move—I cannot; I try, with frantic struggles, gasping for breath, to turn and throw off that creature which is crushing and suffocating me—I cannot!

And suddenly I wake, wild with terror, drenched with perspiration. I light a candle. I am alone.

After this attack, which recurs every night, I fall asleep at last and sleep quietly till dawn.

June 2d.—My condition is worse than ever. What is the matter with me? Bromide does

no good; shower-baths do no good. Not long ago, to tire my body, weary as it is, I went for a walk in the forest of Roumare. I thought at first that the cool, light, soft air, full of the perfume of grass and of leaves, would pour new blood into my veins, impart new courage to my heart. I took a broad hunting-avenue, then turned towards La Bouille, by a narrow path between two armies of immeasurably high trees, which interposed a dense green, almost black, roof between me and the sky.

Suddenly I shivered, not with cold, but with a strange sort of distress.

I quickened my pace, disturbed at being alone in those woods, terrified for no reason, stupidly, by the utter solitude. All at once it seemed to me that I was followed, that somebody was walking at my heels, very close, close enough to touch me.

I turned abruptly. I was alone. I saw behind me only the straight, broad path, high and empty—horrifyingly empty; and in the

other direction, too, it stretched away as far as the eye could see, just the same, terrible to behold.

I closed my eyes. Why? And I began to twirl about on one heel, very rapidly, like a top. I nearly fell; I opened my eyes; the trees were dancing, the earth was like waves; I was forced to sit down. Then, ah me! I did not know which way I had come! What a strange idea! Strange! A strange idea! I did not know at all. I started off towards my right, and came to the avenue which had led me into the heart of the wood.

June 3d.—Last night was fiendish. I am going away for several weeks. A little trip will set me up, no doubt.

July 2d.—I have just returned. I am cured. I have had a delightful trip, too. I have been to Mont-St.-Michel, which I had never seen.

What a vision, when one arrives at Avranches, as I did, at nightfall! The town is on a hill; and they showed me the way to the public garden, at the end of the town. I

cried aloud in amazement. A vast bay stretched away in front of me, as far as the eye could see, between two distant shores that faded away in the haze. And in the centre of that immense yellow bay, beneath a cloudless golden sky, a strange mountain rose, dark and conical, amid the sands. The sun had just disappeared, and against the still blazing horizon that fantastic rock, which bears upon its peak a fantastic monument, stood boldly.

At daybreak I went to it. The tide was low, as on the previous evening, and I watched the amazing abbey rise higher and higher as I drew near. After walking several hours, I reached the huge mass of stone which supports the little city dominated by the great church. Having climbed the steep, narrow street, I entered the most wonderful Gothic temple ever constructed for God on earth—large as a city, full of low rooms crushed by massive arches, and high galleries supported by slender pillars. I entered that gigantic jewel of granite, light and airy as lacework,

covered with towers and with slender belfries, wherein are winding stairways, rearing aloft in the blue sky by day, and in the black sky by night, their curious heads, bristling with chimeras, devils, fantastic beasts, and huge flowers, and connected by arches of delicate workmanship.

When I was at the top, I said to the monk who accompanied me:

"How happy you must be here, father!"

He replied: "There is a great deal of wind, monsieur"; and we began to talk as we watched the rising tide ripple over the sand and cover it with a cuirass of steel.

And the monk told me stories, all the old tales of that spot—legends and more legends.

One of them made a deep impression on me. The people of the neighbourhood, they of the mountain, declare that they hear voices on the sands at night; and that they hear two goats bleat, one with a loud, the other with a faint voice. The incredulous insist that they are

the cries of the sea-birds, which sometimes resemble bleating and sometimes a human wail; but belated fishermen swear that they have met, prowling about the dunes, between two tides, near the little settlement planted thus far from the world, an old shepherd, whose face, always covered with his cloak, no one has ever seen; that he walks before and leads a he-goat with a man's face and a she-goat with a woman's face, both with long, white hair; that the creatures talk constantly, disputing in an unknown tongue; then suddenly cease to talk, and bleat with all their strength.

"Do you believe it?" I asked the monk.

"I do not know," he muttered.

I continued:

"If there are other beings than ourselves on the earth, how is it that we have not known them long ago? How is it that you have not seen them, and that I have not seen them?"

He replied:

"Do we see the hundred-thousandth part

of what exists? Take the wind, for example, which is the greatest force in nature; which overturns men, levels buildings, uproots trees, raises waves mountains-high, destroys cliffs, and dashes great ships upon reefs—the wind that whistles and groans and roars and kills — have you ever seen it, can you see it? And yet it exists."

I had nothing to say before that simple argument. That man was a wise man—or, perhaps, a fool. I could not say certainly which of the two; but I held my peace. What he said I had often thought.

July 3d.—I slept badly; there certainly is something feverish in the air here, for my coachman suffers from the same trouble that I do. When I returned yesterday, I noticed his extraordinary pallor. I asked him:

"What 's the matter with you, Jean?"

"I can't seem to get any sleep, monsieur; my nights are eating up my days. Since monsieur went away, it 's been like a spell."

The other servants are all right, however;

but I am terribly afraid of being taken again.

July 4th.—I certainly am taken again. My old nightmares have returned. Last night I felt some one lying on me, and drinking my life from my lips, with his mouth to mine. Yes, he was sucking it from my throat, like a leech. Then he rose, surfeited, and I awoke, so bruised, crushed, exhausted, that I could not move. If this continues a few days more, I shall certainly go away again.

July 5th. — Have I lost my reason? What happened last night is so strange that my brain whirls when I think of it!

As I do every night now, I turned the key in my door; then, as I was thirsty, I drank half a glass of water, and I happened to notice that my carafe was full to the glass stopper.

Then I went to bed and fell into one of my frightful sleeps, from which I was aroused, about two hours later, by a still more frightful shock.

Imagine a sleeping man being murderously

attacked, and waking with a knife through his lungs, gasping, covered with blood, unable to breathe, at the point of death, and utterly unable to understand—that was my condition.

Having at last recovered my senses, I felt thirsty again; I lighted a candle and went to the table on which I had left my carafe. I lifted it and tipped it over my glass; nothing came out—it was empty! It was absolutely empty! At first, I did not comprehend; then, of a sudden, I felt such a terrible shock that I had to sit down, or rather, that I fell into a chair; then I sprang to my feet and looked about me; then I sat down again, dazed with wonder and fear, before the transparent glass vessel. I gazed at it with staring eyes, trying to solve the problem. My hands shook. Who could have drunk that water? Who? I? I, beyond doubt! It could have been nobody else! In that case, I was a somnambulist, I was living unconsciously that mysterious double life, which raises the question whether there are two beings within us, or whether a foreign

being, unrecognisable and invisible, sometimes, when our mind is benumbed, animates our captive body, which obeys that stranger as it does ourselves, aye, more perfectly than ourselves.

Ah! who can appreciate my frightful suffering? Who can appreciate the agitation of a man of sound mind, wide awake, in full possession of his reason, gazing in dismay through the glass walls of a carafe, in search of a little water which has vanished while he slept? And I stayed there until daylight, afraid to return to my bed.

July 6th.—I am going mad. My carafe was emptied again last night, or rather I drank it all!

But was it I? Was it I? Who else could it have been? Who? O my God! I am going mad! Who will save me?

July 10th.—I have made such amazing experiments. Certainly, I am mad! And yet——

On the sixth of July, before going to bed, I

placed on my table some wine, milk, water, bread, and strawberries.

Some one drank — I drank — all the water and a little milk. The wine and the strawberries were not touched.

On the seventh I repeated the same experiment, with the same result.

On the eighth I omitted the water and the milk. Nothing was touched.

Finally, on the ninth, I put water and milk only on my table, having carefully wrapped the carafes in white muslin bandages, and tied the stoppers. Then I rubbed my lips, beard, and hands with black lead, and went to bed.

Irresistible sleep seized me, followed soon by the ghastly awakening. I had not moved; even my sheets were not stained. I rushed to my table. The bandages about the carafes were spotless. I untied the strings, shaking with dread. All the water had been drunk! all the milk had been drunk!—O my God!

I am going to start for Paris at once.

July 12th.—Paris. I seem to have lost my head those last days! Evidently I was the plaything of my diseased imagination, unless I am really a somnambulist, or unless I have been subjected to one of those influences, known to exist but never explained as yet, which are called suggestions. At all events my folly was beginning to verge on dementia, and twenty-four hours of Paris have sufficed to restore my equilibrium.

Yesterday, after walking about and paying visits, which introduced a new and vivifying atmosphere into my being, I finished the evening at the Théâtre Française. They gave a play by Alexandre Dumas fils, and that active and powerful intellect completed my cure. Solitude is surely dangerous for minds that are always at work. We need to have men about us who think and talk. When we are long alone, we people the void about us with phantoms.

I returned by the boulevards to my hotel, in high spirits. Amidst the jostling of the

crowd, I thought, not without a sneer, of my terrors, my conjectures of last week; for I believed, yes, I really believed that an invisible being was living under my roof. How weak our brain is, and how quickly it takes alarm and goes astray, as soon as some petty incomprehensible fact attracts our attention!

Instead of saying simply: "I do not understand, because the cause escapes me," we instantly imagine shocking mysteries and supernatural powers.

July 14th.—Fête of the Republic. I have been walking about the streets. The flags and fireworks amused me as if I were a child. But it is very stupid to be joyful on an appointed day, by order of the government. The people are an idiotic flock, sometimes stupidly long-suffering and sometimes savagely rebellious. Somebody says to them: "Enjoy yourselves." They enjoy themselves. Somebody says to them: "Go fight with your neighbours." They go and fight. Somebody says to them: "Vote for the Emperor." They

vote for the Emperor. Somebody says to them: "Vote for the Republic." And they vote for the Republic.

Those who guide them are fools, too; but at all events, instead of obeying man, they obey principles, which cannot fail to be idiotic, barren of results, and false, for the very reason that they are principles — that is to say, ideas supposed to be fixed and unchangeable, in this world, where we are sure of nothing, since light is an illusion and sound is an illusion.

July 16th. — I saw some things yesterday which disturbed me much.

I was dining with my cousin, Madame Sablé, whose husband is in command of the 76th Chasseurs, at Limoges. I found myself there in the company of two young women, one of whom is married to a doctor, Dr. Parent, who pays special attention to nervous diseases and to the extraordinary manifestations to which experiments in hypnotism and suggestion are just now giving rise.

He described to us at length the marvellous results obtained by English scientists and by the physicians of the school of Nancy.

The facts that he advanced seemed to me so strange that I pronounced myself an absolute unbeliever.

"We are," he declared, "on the point of discovering one of the most important secrets of Nature — I mean, one of her most important secrets on this earth; for she certainly has some vastly more important ones up yonder among the stars. Since man began to think, since he learned how to tell and to write his thoughts, he has felt the constant presence of a mystery impenetrable by his coarse and imperfect senses; and he has tried to supplement the powerlessness of his bodily organs by the exertions of his intellect. When this intellect was still in the rudimentary stage, this obsession of invisible phenomena assumed the familiar terrifying shapes. Thence were born the popular belief in the supernatural, the legends of prowling spirits, fairies, elves,

ghosts, and I may even say the legend of God; for our conceptions of the Creator, from whatever religion we derive them, are surely the most commonplace, stupid, impossible inventions that ever issued from the timid brain of His creatures. Nothing can be more true than this observation of Voltaire: 'God made man in His own image; but man has done as much for Him.'

"But for more than a century, men have seemed to have a presentiment of something new. Mesmer and some others led us in an unexpected direction, and we have reached, especially within four or five years, some truly surprising results."

My cousin, who was also very incredulous, smiled.

"Would you like me to try to put you to sleep, madame?" Dr. Parent asked her.

"Yes, I would."

She sat in an arm-chair, and he began to gaze fixedly at her, fascinating her. I suddenly felt somewhat perturbed, my heart

beat fast, and my throat became dry. I saw Madame Sablé's eyelids droop, her lips curl, and her bosom rise and fall rapidly.

In ten minutes she was asleep.

"Sit behind her," said the doctor.

I took a seat behind her. He placed a visiting-card in her hands and said:

"This is a mirror; what do you see in it?"

"I see my cousin," she answered.

"What is he doing?"

"Twisting his mustache."

"And now?"

"He is taking a photograph from his pocket."

"Whose photograph?"

"His own."

It was true! And that photograph had been sent to me at the hotel that very evening.

"In what position is he, in the photograph?"

"He is standing with his hat in his hand."

So she could see in that card, in that piece

of white pasteboard, as she would have seen in a mirror!

The young women exclaimed in dismay:

"Enough! Enough! Enough!"

But the doctor continued:

"You will rise to-morrow at eight o'clock; then you will go to your cousin at his hotel, and you will beg him to lend you five thousand francs, for which your husband has asked you, and which you will pay when he next comes to Paris."

Then he woke her.

As I walked back to the hotel, I reflected upon that curious séance, and doubts assailed me—not with respect to the absolute, indubitable good faith of my cousin, whom I had known from childhood, as well as if she had been my sister,—but as to possible trickery on the doctor's part. Had he not, concealed in his hand, a mirror, which he held with the visiting-card before the sleeping woman? Professional sleight-of-hand men do more wonderful things.

I went to my room and to bed.

This morning, about half past eight, I was roused by my valet, who said:

"Madame Sablé wishes to speak with monsieur at once."

I dressed hastily, and she was admitted.

She seemed much disturbed, and she said to me, looking at the floor and without raising her veil:

"My dear cousin, I have a very great favour to ask of you."

"What is it, cousin?"

"It embarrasses me terribly to say it, and yet I must—I need, I absolutely must have, five thousand francs."

"Nonsense! you?"

"Yes, I, or rather, my husband, who has told me to obtain the money."

I was so stupefied that I stammered over my replies. I wondered if, after all, she and Dr. Parent were not making sport of me; if it were not simply a practical joke, arranged beforehand and very well played.

But, upon looking closely at her, all my suspicions vanished! She was trembling with shame and distress, that proceeding was so painful to her; and I could see that her throat was full of sobs.

I knew that she was very rich, and I replied:

"What! your husband has not five thousand francs at his disposal! Come, reflect. Are you sure that he told you to ask me for that sum of money?"

She hesitated some seconds, as if she were making a great effort to remember; then she replied:

"Yes, yes; I am sure."

"Did he write to you?"

She hesitated again, thinking deeply. I divined the tormenting labour of her thought. She did not know. She knew simply that she was to borrow five thousand francs of me for her husband. So she dared to lie.

"Yes, he wrote to me."

"When, pray! You didn't mention it yesterday."

"I received the letter this morning."

"Can you show it to me?"

"No—no—no—it contained some private matters—too private—and I—I—burned it."

"It must be, then, that your husband is running into debt."

She hesitated once more, then murmured:

"I don't know."

I said abruptly:

"The fact is that I can't put my hand on five thousand francs at this moment, my dear cousin."

She gave a sort of shriek of distress.

"Oh! oh! I entreat you, I entreat you, find it somewhere."

She appealed to me fervently, clasping her hands as if she were praying! I noticed that the tone of her voice changed; she wept and stuttered, beset, overpowered by the imperative order she had received.

"Oh! oh! I implore you—if you knew how I suffer! I must have it to-day!"

I took pity on her.

"You shall have the money soon, I give you my word."

"Oh! thanks! thanks!" she cried. "How good you are!"

"Do you remember what happened at your house last night?" I rejoined.

"Yes."

"Do you remember that Dr. Parent put you to sleep?"

"Yes."

"Well, he ordered you to come here this morning and borrow five thousand francs of me, and you are obeying that suggestion at this moment."

She reflected a few seconds, then replied:

"But it is my husband who wants it."

For a whole hour I tried to convince her, but I could not.

When she had gone, I hastened to the doctor's house. He was just going out. He listened to me with a smile. Then he said:

"Do you believe, now?"

"Yes, I am forced to."

"Let us go to your cousin's."

She was already dozing in an invalid's-chair, worn out with fatigue. The doctor felt of her pulse, gazed at her for some time with one hand over her eyes, which she gradually closed beneath the irresistible outflow of that magnetic current.

When she was asleep, he said:

"Your husband is no longer in need of five thousand francs. You will forget, therefore, that you have asked your cousin to lend you the money, and if he mentions the subject to you, you will not understand."

Then he woke her. I took a wallet from my pocket.

"Here is what you asked me for this morning, my dear cousin."

She was so surprised that I dared not persist. I tried, however, to brush up her memory, but she strenuously denied all knowledge of the affair, thought that I was making fun of her, and at last nearly lost her temper.

I have just come home; and I could eat no breakfast, this business has upset me so.

July 19th.—Many people to whom I have told the story have laughed at me. I do not know what to think. The sage says: "Perhaps."

July 21st.—I went to Bougival to dinner, then passed the evening at the boatmen's ball. It is certain that everything depends on place and surroundings. To believe in the supernatural on the island of La Grenouillière would be the height of folly; but on the summit of Mont-St.-Michel? or in India? We are terribly subject to the influence of our surroundings. I shall go home next week.

July 30th.—I have been at home since yesterday. All goes well.

August 2d.—Nothing new; the weather is superb. I pass my days watching the Seine flow.

August 4th.—Disputes among my servants. They insist that some one breaks glasses at night in the closets. The valet accuses the cook, who accuses the laundress, who accuses

the other two. Who is the culprit? He would be a very shrewd person who could tell me!

August 6th.—This time I am not mad. I have seen, I have seen, I have seen! I can doubt no longer—I have seen! I still have shivers under my nails; I am still frightened to the very marrow; I have seen!

At two o'clock I was walking in the bright sunlight, in my rose-garden, in the path lined with autumn roses, which are just beginning to bloom.

As I stopped to look at a *géant des batailles,* on which there were three magnificent flowers, I saw, I saw distinctly the stem of one of them, right at my hand, bend as if an invisible hand had twisted it, then break, as if that hand had plucked the rose? Then the flower ascended, following the curve which an arm would have described in carrying it to the nose; and there it remained, suspended in the clear air, all by itself, motionless, a ghastly red blotch within three feet of my eyes.

Frantic, I rushed at it to grasp it! I found nothing; it had vanished. Thereupon I was seized with a frenzy of rage against myself; for a reasonable and serious-minded man may not have such hallucinations.

But was it really an hallucination? I turned to look at the stalk, and I found it on the bush, freshly broken off, between the other two roses which were still on the branch.

Then I returned to the house, with my brain in a turmoil; for I am certain now, as certain as of the alternation of day and night, that there is in my neighbourhood an invisible being, who feeds on milk and water, and who is capable of touching things, taking them up, and changing their places, and who must be endowed, therefore, with a material nature, although indistinguishable by our senses; and who lives, as I do, under my roof.

August 7th.—I slept quietly. He drank the water in my carafe, but he did not disturb my sleep.

I am wondering if I am mad. While I

walked about just now, in the bright sunlight, by the river, doubts came to my mind concerning my reason — not vague doubts such as I have had hitherto, but definite, absolute doubts. I have seen madmen; I have known some who were still intelligent, lucid, clear-sighted even, with respect to all the affairs of life except some one point. They would talk upon every other subject clearly, keenly, profoundly; and suddenly their mind, touching upon the reef of their mania, would be dashed in pieces, scattered broadcast, and foundered in that terrifying and maddened ocean of rolling waves, of fogs, and of tempests, which is called dementia.

I certainly should deem myself mad, absolutely mad, if I were not conscious, if I were not perfectly acquainted with my condition, if I did not sound and analyse it with entire lucidity. So that I am, in fact, simply a sane victim of hallucinations. Some unknown disturbance has taken place in my brain, one of those disturbances which the physiologists of

to-day are trying to fix and to particularise; and that disturbance has produced in my mind a deep crevasse, in the line of the logical order of my ideas. Such phenomena take place in the dreams that lure us through the most unlikely scenes, without a sensation of surprise, because the verifying apparatus, the sense of perception, is asleep, whereas the power of imagination is awake and at work. May it not be that one of the invisible keys of my cerebral keyboard is paralysed? As the result of accidents men lose the memory of proper names, of words, of figures, or only of dates. The localisation of each molecule of thought is established to-day. Now, what would there be surprising in the fact that my power to detect the unreality of certain hallucinations is asleep in me at this moment?

I thought of all this as I walked by the river. The sun bathed the stream in light, made the earth a joy, filled my glance with love of life, of the swallows, whose activity

is a delight to my eyes, and of the grasses on the bank, whose rustling is a pleasure to my ears.

Little by little, however, an inexplicable feeling of discomfort stole over me. It seemed to me that a force, a hidden force, benumbed me, detained me, prevented me from going farther, called me back. I was conscious of that painful longing to return which oppresses you when you have left a loved one at home ill, and a presentiment that he has grown worse assails you.

So I returned in spite of myself, sure that I was about to find at my house some bad news, a letter, or a despatch. There was nothing; and I was more surprised and disturbed than if I had had another impossible vision.

August 8th.—I passed a ghastly evening yesterday. He does not manifest his presence any more, but I feel that he is near me, spying upon me, watching me, reading my thoughts, dominating my acts, and more to

be dreaded when he conceals himself so, than if he advertised his constant, invisible presence by supernatural phenomena.

However, I slept.

August 9th.—Nothing; but I am afraid.

August 10th.—Nothing; what will happen to-morrow?

August 11th.—Still nothing; I cannot stay here any longer with this dread and this haunting thought in my mind; I am going away.

August 12th, ten o'clock at night.—All day I have tried to go away, but I have not been able to. I have tried to accomplish that act of free will, so simple and so easy—go out, enter my carriage and drive to Rouen—but I have not been able to. Why?

August 13th.—When one is attacked by certain diseases, all the springs of the physical being seem to be broken, all the energy crushed, all the muscles relaxed, the bones to become soft like flesh, and the flesh liquid like water. I am having that experience in my

moral being, in a strange and despairing fashion. I have no strength, no courage, no control over myself, no power even to set my will in motion. I can no longer will; but somebody else wills for me, and I obey.

August 14th.—I am lost! Some one possesses my soul and controls it! some one possesses my soul and controls it! some one orders my every act, my every motion, my every thought! I am no longer anything at all in myself, I am nothing but a spectator, enslaved and terrified by everything I do. I want to go out. I cannot. He is unwilling. And I remain, trembling, beside myself, in the chair in which he keeps me seated. I try simply to rise, just to rise, so that I may believe that I am my own master. I cannot! I am glued to my seat; and my seat clings to the ground, so that no force could raise us.

Then, of a sudden, I must, I must, I must go to the end of the garden to pick some strawberries and eat them. And I go there. I pick strawberries and eat them. O my

God! my God! my God! Is there a God? If there is one, save me! help me! set me free! Pardon! Mercy! Pity! Save me! Oh! what agony! what torture! what a horror!

August 15th.—This is certainly the way that my poor cousin was beset and controlled when she came to borrow five thousand francs of me. She was subjected to a strange will that had entered into her, as it were another mind, a grasping and guiding mind. Is the world coming to an end?

But this being that is governing me—what is it?—this invisible, unrecognisable prowler of a supernatural order?

So invisible beings do exist! In that case, how is it that since the beginning of the world they have never before manifested themselves so unmistakably as they are doing for me? I have never read of anything that resembles what has been going on in my house. Oh! if only I could leave it, if I could go away, flee, and never return! I should be saved; but I cannot do it.

August 16th.—I succeeded in escaping for two hours to-day, like a prisoner who finds the door of his dungeon left open by chance. I had a feeling that I was suddenly set free, and that he was far away. I ordered the horses to be harnessed instantly, and I drove to Rouen. Oh! what joy to be able to say: "Go to Rouen!" to a man who obeys.

I stopped at the library and asked to be allowed to take Dr. Hermann Herestauss's monumental treatise on the unknown inhabitants of the ancient and the modern world. Then, as I was about to return to my coupé, I tried to say: "To the railway!" and I shrieked —I did not say it, I shrieked it—so loud that the passers-by turned to look: "Home!" and I fell, beside myself with horror, on the seat of my carriage. He had found me and resumed possession.

August 17th.—Oh! what a night! what a night! And yet it seems to me that I ought to rejoice. I read until one o'clock in the morning. Hermann Herestauss, doctor of

philosophy and theogony, has written the history and the manifestations of all the invisible beings that prowl about man, or that he sees in dreams. He describes their origin, their domain, their power. But not one of them resembles the one that haunts me. One would say that man, since he began to think, has foreseen and dreaded the appearance of a new type of being, stronger than himself, his destined successor in this world; and that, feeling that that master was near at hand, and being unable to divine his nature, he has evolved, in his terror, the whole imaginary throng of occult beings, vague shadows born of fear.

Having read, then, until one o'clock in the morning, I sat at my open window to cool my forehead and my brain in the gentle night wind.

It was warm and pleasant. How I would have loved that night formerly!

No moon. The stars emitted quivering gleams in the depths of the black sky. Who

lives in those worlds? What shapes, what living things, what animals, what plants are there? What, more than we, do the thinking beings in those distant worlds know? What can they do more than we? What do they see that we do not know? Will not one of them some day, passing through space, appear on our earth to conquer it, as the Normans crossed the sea long ago to subdue a weaker people?

We are so inferior, so helpless, so ignorant, we mortals, on this grain of mud turning about in a drop of water!

Musing thus in the cool evening breeze, I dozed.

After sleeping about forty minutes, I opened my eyes without moving, awakened by I know not what confused and peculiar emotion. I saw nothing at first; then of a sudden, it seemed to me that a page of the book that lay open on my table turned of itself. No breath of air had come in at my window. I was surprised, and I waited. After about four

minutes, I saw, I saw, yes, with my own eyes I saw another page rise and turn over on the preceding one, as if a finger had turned it. My arm-chair was empty, seemed empty; but I realised that he was there, sitting in my place and reading. With a furious spring, the spring of an enraged beast whose purpose is to disembowel his tamer, I rushed across my chamber to seize him, to strangle him, to kill him! But before I reached my chair, it fell backwards, as if some one were flying from me; my table shook, my lamp fell and went out; and my window closed, as if a thief surprised in the act had jumped out into the darkness, seizing the swinging sashes in his hands.

So he had fled; he was afraid, afraid of me! If that was so, why, to-morrow—or the day after, or some day or other—I might be able to hold him in my hands and to crush him against the ground! Do not dogs sometimes bite and choke their masters?

August 18th.—I have been meditating all

day. Oh, yes! I will obey him, follow his suggestions, comply with all his desires, be humble, resigned, cowardly. He is the stronger. But the time will come ——

August 19th.—I know—I know—I know all. I just read this in the *Revue du Monde Scientifique:*

"A decidedly interesting report reaches us from Rio de Janeiro. An epidemic of insanity, not unlike the contagious types of dementia that attacked the nations of Europe in the Middle Ages, is raging at the present time in the province of San Paulo. The terrified inhabitants are leaving their homes, deserting their villages and crops, declaring that they are persecuted, possessed, driven like human cattle by invisible but tangible creatures resembling vampires, who feed on their life during their sleep, and drink water and milk, apparently never touching any other food.

"Monsieur the Professor Don Pedro Henriquez, accompanied by several skillful physi-

cians, has started for the province of San Paulo, in order to study on the spot the origin and manifestations of this extraordinary mania, and to suggest to the Emperor such measures as seem to him best adapted to recall those demented people to reason."

Ah! I remember the handsome Brazilian three-master that went up the Seine by my window on the eighth of May last! I thought her so beautiful, so white and cheerful! The being was on board of her, coming from across the ocean, where his race had its origin. And he saw me! He saw my white house, too; and he jumped ashore from the vessel. O my God!

Now I know, I understand. The reign of man is at an end.

He has come—he whom the earliest peoples dreaded in their artless terror; he whom anxious priests exorcised, whom sorcerers evoked on dark nights (although he did not appear); he to whom the presentiments of the ephemeral masters of the world ascribed

the monstrous or graceful forms of gnomes, spirits, genii, fairies, or will-o'-the-wisps. After the ill-defined conceptions of primitive terror, more perspicacious men evolved a more distinct idea of him. Mesmer divined him, and, in the past ten years, physicians have definitely discovered the nature of his power, even before he had exercised it himself. They have played with this instrument of the new lord, the predominance of a mysterious will over the human soul transformed into a slave. They have named it magnetism, hypnotism, suggestion — Heaven knows what! I have seen them play with this terrible power like imprudent children! Woe to us! Woe to mankind! He has come, the — the — what is he called? It seems to me that he is shrieking his name at me and I cannot hear him — yes, he is shouting it. I am listening — I cannot — say it again — the — the Horla. I heard — the Horla — that is he — the Horla — he has come!

Ah! the vulture has devoured the dove, the

wolf has devoured the lamb, the lion has devoured the sharp-horned buffalo, man has killed the lion with the arrow, with the sword, with powder; but the Horla is going to make of man what we have made of the horse and the ox; his chattel, his servant, and his sustenance, solely by the power of his will. Woe to us!

But the animal sometimes rebels and kills the man who has subdued him; and I too propose — I may be able — but I must know him, touch him, see him. The scientists say that the eye of the beast is different from ours, cannot distinguish objects as our eyes do. And my eye cannot distinguish the newcomer who persecutes me.

Why? Oh! I recall now the words of the monk of Mont-St.-Michel: "Do we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? Take the wind, for example, which is the greatest force in nature; which overturns men, levels buildings, uproots trees, raises waves mountain high, destroys cliffs,

and dashes great ships upon reefs — the wind that whistles and groans and roars and kills — have you ever seen it, can you see it? And yet it exists."

And I mused on: my eye is so weak, so imperfect, that it cannot even distinguish hard bodies if they are transparent, like glass! If a glass without a backing of quicksilver stands in my path, my eye casts me upon it, as the bird that has flown into a room bangs its head against the windows. A thousand other things deceive and mislead my eye. What is there surprising then in its being unable to see a new kind of body which the light shines through?

A new type of being! Why not? It is destined to come, beyond question; why should we be the last? We cannot distinguish him, as we can all the others created before us. That is because his nature is more perfect, his body more delicate and more finely finished than ours — than ours, which is so helpless, so bunglingly conceived, so

embarrassed by organs that are always tired, always overworked, like too complicated springs; than ours, which lives like the plants, and like the beasts, sustaining itself with difficulty on air, grain, and meat—an animallike machine, subject to diseases, to deformities, to putrefaction, broken-winded, ill-regulated, innocent, and eccentric, ingeniously misshapen, of rough yet delicate workmanship—an unfinished sketch of a being which might become intelligent and superb.

There have been so few of us on this earth, from the oyster to man. Why not one more, when the period has elapsed that separates the successive appearances of all the different species?

Why not one more? Why not, too, other trees, with enormous flowers, gorgeous in hue, and perfuming whole districts? Why not other elements than fire, air, earth, and water? There are four, only four, of those foster-fathers of mortals! What a pity! Why are there not forty, four hundred, four

thousand? How paltry, mean, wretched everything is!—stingily provided, stupidly conceived, awkwardly constructed! What grace in the elephant and in the hippopotamus! How shapely the camel!

But, you will say, the butterfly—a flying flower! I dream of one as large as a hundred worlds, with wings whose shape, beauty, colour, and motion I cannot describe. But I can see it—it flits from star to star, refreshing and perfuming them with the light and harmonious breath of its flight. And the peoples on high watch it pass, enraptured, in an ecstasy of delight.

What is the matter with me? It is he, he, the Horla, who haunts me and gives me these foolish ideas. He is within me, he is becoming my very soul. I will kill him!

August 19th.—I will kill him. I have seen him! I was seated last night at my table, and I pretended to be writing very earnestly. I knew perfectly well that he would come

prowling about me, close, so close that perhaps I could touch him, catch him! And then! Then I would assume the shape of the desperate; I would have my hands, my knees, my breast, my head, my teeth, to strangle, crush, bite, and rend him. And I watched for him with all my overstrained organs.

I had lighted both my lamps and the eight candles on my mantel, as if that bright light would help me to discover him.

Opposite me, my bed, an old oak bed, with columns; at my right, the fireplace; at my left, the door, which I had carefully secured after leaving it open a long while, to lure him in; behind me, a very tall wardrobe, with a mirror in the door, which I used every day for shaving and dressing, and in which I was accustomed to look at myself from head to foot every time that I passed it.

As I was saying, I pretended to write, in order to deceive him, for he was watching me too; and of a sudden I felt, I was absolutely sure that he was reading over my shoul-

der, that he was standing there, rubbing against my ear.

I sprang up, with my hands outstretched, turning so quickly that I almost fell. Well! the room was as light as in broad day, and I could not see myself in my mirror! It was void of any image, clear, profound, and ablaze with light! My image was not to be seen, and I was facing it! I saw the tall glass, perfectly clear, from top to bottom. And I gazed at it with frenzied eyes; I dared not step forward, I dared not move, feeling certain, however, that he was there, but that he would escape me again—he whose invisible body had consumed my reflection.

How terrified I was! Then, all of a sudden, I began to make out my features in a sort of mist, at the back of the mirror—in a mist, as if through a sheet of water; and the water seemed to me to glide from left to right, slowly, making my image clearer from second to second. It was like the end of an eclipse. The thing that concealed me seemed not to

possess sharply defined outlines, but a sort of transparent opacity, which faded away little by little.

I was able at last to distinguish my whole person, as I did every day when I looked at myself.

I had seen him! The horror of it is still upon me and makes me shudder even now.

August 20th. — Kill him — how? since I cannot catch him? Poison? but he would see me mixing it with the water; indeed, would our poisons have any effect on an invisible body? No — no — of course not. Then? then?

August 21st.—I have sent for a locksmith from Rouen, and ordered iron shutters for my bedroom, such as they have in Paris, on the ground floor of some private houses, for fear of burglars. He is to make me a door of the same kind also. I have made myself out a coward, but I care little for that!

September 10th.—Rouen, Hotel Continental. It is done, it is done; but is he dead? My

mind is completely unhinged by what I have seen!

Yesterday, my locksmith having put my iron shutters and door in place, I left everything open until midnight, although it was beginning to grow cold.

Suddenly I felt that he was there, and joy, frantic joy took possession of me. I rose slowly, and walked about a long while, here and there, so that he should suspect nothing; then I took off my boots and put on my slippers in a heedless sort of way; then I closed my iron shutters, and walking quietly to the door, I locked it with a double turn. Returning then to the window, I secured it with a padlock, the key of which I placed in my pocket.

Suddenly I realised that he was hovering about me, that he was having his turn at being frightened, that he was willing me to let him out. I almost gave way; I did not, however, but, turning my back to the door, I opened it just far enough to allow me to pass,

walking backwards; and, as I am very tall, my head touched the lintel. I was sure that he had not succeeded in eluding me, and I locked him in alone, all alone. What joy! I had him! Then I ran down-stairs; I took the two lamps in my salon, under my bedroom, and I poured all the oil on the rugs, on the furniture, everywhere; then I set fire to it, and made my escape, after I had carefully locked the front door.

And I hid at the end of my garden, in a clump of laurels. How slow it was! how slow it was! Everything was black, silent, motionless; not a breath of air, not a star — mountains of clouds which I could not see, but which weighed upon my heart, so heavy! so heavy!

I gazed at my house and waited. How long it was! I had concluded that the fire had gone out of itself, or that he had put it out, when one of the lower windows burst with the outrush of the heat, and a flame, a long red and yellow flame, supple and caress-

ing, swept up the white wall and kissed it to the eaves. A gleam ran among the trees, the branches, the leaves; and a shudder, a shudder of fear, as well. The birds awoke; a dog began to howl; it seemed to me that day was breaking. In a moment two other windows burst, and I saw that the whole lower part of my house was simply a frightful furnace. But a shriek, a horrible, piercing, heartrending shriek, a woman's shriek, rang out in the darkness, and two attic windows were thrown open. I had forgotten my servants! I saw their frantic faces and their arms waving wildly.

At that, crazed with horror, I ran towards the village, shouting: "Help! help! Fire! fire!" I met some people already on their way, and I went back with them, to watch.

The house by now was simply a ghastly but magnificent funeral pyre, a monstrous blaze, illuminating the whole earth, a blaze in which men were burning, and in which he was burning, too, he, my prisoner, the new being, the new master, the Horla!

Suddenly the whole roof was swallowed up between the walls, and a volcano of flame rushed up towards heaven.

Through all the windows opening into the furnace, I could see the fiery vat; and I believed that he was there, in that oven, dead.

Dead? Perhaps. But his body? was not his body, which the light shone through, indestructible by the means which kill our bodies?

Suppose he were not dead? It may be that time alone has power over the invisible and formidable being. Why that transparent, unrecognisable body, that body of spirit, if it too must dread disease, wounds, infirmities, premature destruction?

Premature destruction! All the terror that mankind suffers comes from that. After man, the Horla. After him who may die any day, at any hour, at any moment, by any sort of accident, has come he who is not to die until his appointed day, hour, and minute, because he has reached the limit of his existence!

The Horla

No — no — beyond any doubt, beyond any doubt, he is not dead. Then — then — it will soon be necessary for me to kill myself!

1887.

Little Soldier

Little Soldier

EVERY Sunday, as soon as they were at liberty, the two little soldiers would set forth.

They turn to the right on leaving the barracks, march rapidly through Courbevoie as if they were out for drill; then, as soon as they had left the houses behind, they would follow at a more quiet pace the bare and dusty high-road that leads to Bezons.

They were short and spare, lost in their too long and too ample coats, the sleeves of which covered their hands; embarrassed by the red breeches, which were too large for them and forced them to stretch their legs apart if they would walk fast. And beneath the stiff, tall shakos one could see almost nothing of their faces — two poor Breton faces, with hollow cheeks; simple with an almost animallike innocence, with soft, placid blue eyes.

They never spoke while they walked, but went straight on, with the same thought in their minds, which took the place of conversation; for they had found, on the edge of the little wood of Les Champioux, a spot that reminded them of their own country, and they felt at ease nowhere else.

At the junction of the roads from Colombes and Chatou, when they were under the trees, they would always remove the shakos, which weighed heavily on their heads, and they would wipe their brows.

They always stopped a while on the Bezons bridge, to look at the Seine. They would stand there two or three minutes, bent double, leaning over the parapet; or they would gaze at the great basin of Argenteuil, where the bellying, white sails of the clippers scudded by, recalling perhaps the Breton sea, the port of Vannes, which was near their homes; and the fishing vessels sailing across Morbihan towards the open sea. As soon as they had crossed the Seine, they would buy their day's

provisions at the pork-shop, the bakery, and the wine-shop of the neighbourhood. A bit of pork-pie, four sous' worth of bread, and a litre of *petit bleu* constituted their provisions, which they carried away in their handkerchiefs. But, as soon as they had left the village, they walked very slowly and began to talk.

Before them a barren plain, with a clump of trees here and there, led to the wood, the little wood that looked like that at Kermarivan. Wheat and oats lined the narrow road, which was hidden by the fresh young verdure of the new crops; and Jean Kerderen would invariably say to Luc le Ganidec:

"It 's just like Plounivon."

"Yes, it 's just like it."

They would walk on, side by side, their minds filled with vague memories of their own country, filled with reawakened images, images as naïve as the coloured pictures you buy for a sou. They seemed to see a corner of a field, a hedge, a bit of moor, a cross-roads, a granite cross.

And they always stopped beside a stone that marked the boundary of an estate, because it had a look of the cromlech at Locneuven.

Every Sunday when they reached the first clump of trees, Luc le Ganidec would cut a hazel switch and would gently set about peeling off the bark, thinking of the folks at home.

Jean Kerderen carried the provisions.

From time to time Luc would mention a name, or recall some incident of their childhood, in a few words which gave them food for long thought. And their own country, their dear, distant country would gradually take possession of them, sweep over them, and send them across the intervening space its shapes, its sounds, its familiar landscapes, its odours — the odour of the green moor swept by the sea-breeze.

They no longer smelt the exhalations from the Parisian dunghill with which the soil of the suburbs is fertilised, but the sweet perfume of the flowering broom, plucked and

whirled away by the salt breeze of the open sea. And the sails of the small boats, showing above the banks, seemed to them to be the sails of the coasting-vessels, seen beyond the broad plain that stretched away from their homes to the water's edge.

And Luc le Ganidec and Jean Kerderen would walk slowly on, happy yet sad, haunted by a mild sort of melancholy, the slow and penetrating melancholy of a caged animal that remembers.

And by the time Luc had finished stripping the slender switch of its bark, they would have reached the corner of the wood where they breakfasted every Sunday.

They would find the two bricks that they had hidden in the underbrush, and would light a little fire of dry branches, to cook their pork-pie on the point of a bayonet.

And when they had breakfasted, eaten their bread to the last crumb, and drunk their wine to the last drop, they would remain seated on the grass side by side, without speaking, their

eyes far away, their eyelids drooping, their fingers crossed as during mass, their red legs stretched out beside the poppies; and the leather of their shakos and their brass buttons glittered in the hot sun and checked the flight of the larks that flew singing over their heads.

About noon they would begin to turn their eyes now and then towards the village of Bezons, for it was time for the girl who tended the cow to come.

She passed them every Sunday on her way to milk and house her cow, the only cow in the neighbourhood which was out at grass; it was pastured in a narrow field on the edge of the wood, farther on.

Soon they would spy the girl, the sole human being abroad in that part of the country; and their hearts were made glad by the dazzling reflection cast by her tin pail when the sun's rays fell upon it. They never talked of her. They were simply glad to see her, but did not understand why.

Little Soldier

She was a tall, robust girl, with red hair, burned by the heat of sunny days — a great, plain-spoken girl of the environs of Paris.

Once, when she saw them seated in the same place, she said to them:

"Good day; so you always come here, do you?"

Luc le Ganidec, being the bolder, stammered:

"Yes, we come here to rest."

That was all. But the next Sunday she laughed when she saw them, she laughed with the patronising good-humour of a quick-witted woman who divined their timidity. And she asked:

"What you doing there? Watching the grass grow?"

Luc smiled back with unwonted animation: "Maybe so."

"Well!" she rejoined; "it don't grow very fast."

"That 's so," he replied, still laughing.

She went on. But when she returned with

her pail full of milk, she stopped in front of them again, and said:

"Would you like a drop? It will remind you of home."

With the instinct of a creature of the same race, and like them far from home, perhaps, she had divined truly and touched the right spot.

They were both moved. Thereupon she poured a little milk, not without difficulty, into the mouth of the bottle in which they had brought their wine; and Luc drank first, with little sips, stopping every second to make sure that he had not taken more than his share. Then he handed the bottle to Jean.

She remained standing in front of them, with her hands on her hips, her pail on the ground at her feet, well pleased with the pleasure she had given them.

Then she went away, shouting:

"Well, good-by; till next Sunday!"

And they followed with their eyes, as long

as they could see her, the tall, receding figure, which grew smaller and smaller and seemed to bury itself in the verdure.

When they left the barracks the following week, Jean said to Luc:

"Had n't we better buy her something good?"

And they faced in dire perplexity the problem of choosing a delicacy for the girl with the cow.

Luc favoured chitterlings, but Jean preferred candy, for he was fond of sweet things. His opinion prevailed, and they purchased at a grocer's two sous' worth of white and red bonbons.

They breakfasted more quickly than usual, excited by anticipation.

Jean saw her first.

"There she is!" he said.

And Luc replied:

"Yes. There she is."

She laughed in the distance when she saw them, and called to them:

"How goes everything?"

And they replied in the same breath:

"How is it with you?"

Then she talked, talked of simple things that interested them — the weather, the crops, her employers.

They were afraid to offer their bonbons, which were slowly melting away in Jean's pocket.

At last Luc made bold, and murmured:

"We've brought you something."

"What is it?" she asked.

Thereupon Jean, blushing up to the ears, produced the little paper cornucopia, and handed it to her.

She began to eat the bits of sugar, rolling them from one cheek to the other, so that they made lumps under her flesh. The two soldiers, seated in front of her, gazed at her, deeply moved and delighted.

Then she went to milk her cow, and again gave them milk when she returned.

They thought of her all the week and spoke

of her several times. On the following Sunday she sat down by them for a longer talk; and all three, side by side, their eyes far away and their knees clasped in their folded hands, related trivial incidents and trivial details of the villages where they were born, while the cow yonder, seeing that the girl had halted on the way, held out its heavy head with its moist nostrils, and gave a long low to call her.

Soon the girl accepted an invitation to take a bite with them and drink a little wine. She often brought them plums in her pockets, for the plum season had come. Her presence enlivened the two little Breton soldiers, who chattered like two birds.

Now, one Tuesday, Luc le Ganidec asked for leave, a thing which he had never done before; and he did not return to barracks until ten at night.

Jean was disturbed, and tried to think what reason his comrade could have had for absenting himself so.

On the following Friday Luc, having borrowed ten sous of the occupant of the next bed, again asked and obtained a few hours' leave.

And when he set out with Jean for their Sunday walk, his whole demeanour was peculiar — excited and altogether different. Kerderen did not understand, but he vaguely suspected that something was afoot, although he could not guess what it might be.

They did not say a word until they reached their usual stopping-place, where they had worn the grass away by sitting always in the same spot; and they breakfasted slowly. Neither of them was hungry or thirsty.

Soon the girl appeared. They watched her approach, as they did every Sunday. When she was close at hand, Luc rose and walked towards her. She put her pail on the ground and kissed him. She kissed him passionately, throwing her arms about his neck, unmindful of Jean; she did not see him, did not think about his being there.

And there sat poor Jean, utterly bewildered, so bewildered that he could not understand; his mind in a whirl, his heart broken, but unable to grasp the situation.

Then the girl sat down beside Luc, and they began to talk.

Jean did not look at them; he divined now why his comrade had gone away twice during the week, and he was conscious of a sharp pang, a sort of wound — that rending of the fibres which is caused by treachery.

Luc and the girl rose together to go to change the position of the cow.

Jean looked after them. He saw them walk away side by side. His comrade's red breeches made a bright spot on the road. It was Luc who picked up the mallet, and who drove in the stake to which the beast was tied.

The girl stooped to milk her, while Luc with a distraught hand patted the animal's razorlike back. Then they left the pail in the grass, and went into the woods.

Jean saw only the wall of leaves where

they had entered; and he felt so overwhelmed that, if he had tried to rise, he would surely have fallen flat.

He sat perfectly still, stupefied with amazement and distress, unaffected and profound distress. He longed to weep, to run away, to hide himself, never to see a human being again.

Suddenly he saw them come out of the wood. They walked slowly back, hand in hand, as betrothed couples do in villages. Luc was carrying the pail.

They kissed again before they parted, and the girl went her way with a friendly "good night" and a significant glance at Jean. She did not think to offer him milk that day.

The two little soldiers sat side by side, as usual, without moving, silent and calm, their placid faces betraying nothing of the perturbation of their hearts. The sun beat down upon them. The cow lowed now and again as she gazed at them from afar.

At the usual time they rose to return.

Luc peeled a switch, Jean carried the empty

bottle. He left it with the keeper of the wine-shop at Bezons. Then they started across the bridge, and, as they did every Sunday, stopped in the middle to watch the water for a few moments.

Jean leaned over, leaned farther and farther over the iron railing, as if he had seen something in the stream that attracted him.

"Do you mean to take a drink?" Luc asked him.

As he uttered the last word Jean's head carried away his body, his legs described a circle in the air, and the little blue and red soldier fell like a stone, entered the water, and disappeared.

Luc, his throat paralysed with anguish, tried in vain to shout. He saw something move at some distance; then his comrade's head rose to the surface and instantly went under again.

Still farther away he saw a hand, a single hand, which came out of the water, then plunged back. That was all.

The boatmen who hurried to the spot did not find the body that day.

Luc returned alone to the barracks, running at full speed, like one distracted; and he told of the accident, his eyes and his voice full of tears, and blowing his nose incessantly:

"He leaned over — he — he leaned over so far — so far — that his head turned a somersault — and — and — he fell — he fell ——"

He could say no more, for his emotion suffocated him. If he had only known!

1886.

A Coward

A Coward

HE was known in society as "the handsome Signoles." His name was Viscount Gontran Joseph de Signoles.

An orphan and the possessor of a sufficient fortune, he cut a dash, as they say. He had style and presence, sufficient fluency of speech to make people think him clever, a certain natural grace, an air of nobility and pride, a gallant mustache, and a gentle eye, which the women like.

He was in great demand in the salons, much sought after by fair dancers; and he aroused in his own sex that smiling animosity which they always feel for men of an energetic figure. He had been suspected of several love-affairs well adapted to cause a young bachelor to be much esteemed. He passed a happy, unconcerned life, in a comfort of mind

which was most complete. He was known to be a skillful fencer, and with the pistol even more adept.

"If I ever fight a duel," he would say, "I shall choose the pistol. With that weapon I am sure of killing my man."

Now, one evening, when he had accompanied to the theatre two young lady friends of his, whose husbands also were of the party, he invited them, after the play, to take an ice at Tortoni's. They had been at the café but a few moments, when he noticed that a man sitting at a table near by was staring persistently at one of his fair neighbours. She seemed annoyed and uneasy, and lowered her eyes. At last she said to her husband:

"That man is staring me out of countenance. I don't know him; do you?"

The husband, who had noticed nothing, raised his eyes, and answered:

"No, not at all."

The young woman continued, half smiling, half vexed:

"It is very unpleasant; that man is spoiling my ice."

The husband shrugged his shoulders:

"Pshaw! don't pay any attention to him. If we had to bother our heads about all the impertinent fellows we meet, we should never have done."

But the viscount had risen abruptly. He could not suffer that stranger to spoil an ice which he had offered. It was to him that the affront was paid, since it was through him and for him that his friends had entered the café, so that the affair was his concern, and his alone.

He walked towards the man and said to him:

"You have a way of looking at those ladies, monsieur, that I cannot tolerate. I beg you to be so kind as to stare less persistently."

The other retorted:

"You may go to the devil!"

"Take care, monsieur," said the viscount, with clenched teeth; "you will force me to pass bounds."

The gentleman answered but one word, a

foul word, that rang from one end of the café to the other, and caused every guest to give a sudden start, as if moved by a hidden spring. Those whose backs were turned wheeled round; all the others raised their heads; three waiters whirled about on their heels like tops; the two women at the desk gave a jump, then turned completely round, like automata obedient to the same crank.

Profound silence ensued. Suddenly a sharp sound cracked in the air. The viscount had slapped his adversary. Every one rose to interfere. Cards were exchanged between the two.

When the viscount had returned to his apartment, he paced the floor for several minutes, with great, quick strides. He was too much agitated to reflect. A single thought hovered over his mind — "a duel" — without arousing any emotion whatsoever. He had done what he should have done; he had shown himself to be what he ought to be. His con-

duct would be discussed and approved; people would congratulate him. He said aloud, speaking as one speaks when one's thoughts are in great confusion:

"What a brute the fellow was!"

Then he sat down and began to consider. He must find seconds, in the morning. Whom should he choose? He thought over those of his acquaintances who were the most highly esteemed and the best-known. He decided at last upon the Marquis de la Tour-Noire and the Colonel Bourdin — a great noble and a soldier — excellent! Their names would sound well in the papers. He discovered that he was thirsty, and he drank three glasses of water in rapid succession; then he resumed his pacing of the floor. He felt full of energy. If he blustered a little, seemed determined to carry the thing through, demanded rigorous and dangerous conditions, insisted upon a serious duel, very serious and terrible, his adversary would probably back down and apologise.

He picked up the card, which he had drawn

from his pocket and tossed on the table, and read it again, as he had read it in a glance at the café, and again in the cab, by the glimmer of every street-lamp, on his way home. "Georges Lamil, 51 Rue Moncey." Nothing more.

He examined these assembled letters, which seemed to him mysterious, full of vague meaning. Georges Lamil! Who was this man? What was his business? Why had he stared at that lady in such a way? Was it not disgusting that a stranger, an unknown, should cause such a change in one's life, because it had pleased him to fasten his eyes insolently upon a lady?

And the viscount again exclaimed, aloud:

"What a brute!"

Then he stood perfectly still, thinking, his eyes still glued to the card. There arose within him a fierce anger against that bit of paper — a malevolent sort of rage, blended with a strange feeling of discomfort. What a stupid business! He took a penknife that

lay open to his hand, and stuck it through the middle of the printed name, as if he were stabbing some one.

So he must fight! Should he choose swords or pistols?—for he deemed himself the insulted party. He ran less risk with the sword; but with the pistol he had a chance of making his opponent withdraw. A duel with swords is rarely fatal, mutual prudence preventing the combatants from engaging near enough to each other for a point to enter very deep. With the pistol his life was seriously endangered; but he might in that way come out of the affair with all the honours, and without coming to a meeting.

"I must be firm," he said. "He will be afraid."

The sound of his voice made him tremble, and he looked about him. He felt extremely nervous. He drank another glass of water, then began to undress for bed.

As soon as he was in bed, he blew out the light and shut his eyes.

He thought:

"I have all day to-morrow to arrange my affairs. I must sleep now, so that I may be calm."

He was very warm under the bedclothes, but he could not manage to doze off. He twisted and turned, lay on his back five minutes, then changed to the left side, then rolled over on his right.

He was still thirsty. He got up again, to drink. Then a disquieting thought occurred to him:

"Can it be that I am afraid?"

Why did his heart begin to beat wildly at every familiar sound in the room? When the clock was about to strike, the faint whirring of the spring making ready made him jump; and then he had to keep his mouth open for several seconds to breathe, the oppression was so great.

He commenced to argue with himself concerning the possibility of this thing:

"Am I afraid?"

No, of course he was not afraid, as he had determined to carry the thing through, as his mind was fully made up to fight, and not to tremble. But he felt so profoundly troubled that he asked himself the question:

"Is it possible to be afraid in spite of one's self?"

And that doubt, that disquietude, that dread took possession of him; if some force stronger than his will, a dominating, irresistible power should conquer him, what would happen? Yes, what could happen? He certainly would go to the ground, inasmuch as he had made up his mind to go there. But suppose his hand should tremble? Suppose he should faint? And he thought of his position, of his reputation, of his name.

And suddenly a strange fancy seized him to get up, in order to look in the mirror. He relit his candle. When he saw the reflection of his face in the polished glass, he could hardly recognise himself, and it seemed to him that he had never seen this man before.

His eyes appeared enormous; and he was certainly pale—yes, very pale.

He remained standing in front of the mirror. He put out his tongue as if to test the state of his health, and of a sudden this thought burst into his mind like a bullet:

"The day after to-morrow, at this time, I may be dead."

And his heart began to beat furiously again.

"The day after to-morrow, at this time, I may be dead. This person in front of me, this I, whom I am looking at in this mirror, will be no more! What! I am standing here, looking at myself, conscious that I am a living man; and in twenty-four hours I shall be lying on that bed, dead, with my eyes closed, cold, lifeless, gone!"

He turned towards the bed, and he distinctly saw himself lying on his back, between the very sheets that he had just left. He had the hollow cheeks that dead bodies have, and that slackness of the hands that will never stir more.

Thereupon he conceived a fear of his bed, and, in order to avoid looking at it, passed into his smoking-room. He mechanically took a cigar, lighted it, and began to pace the floor anew. He was cold; he walked to the bell-cord to wake his valet; but he stopped, with his hand half-way to the cord.

"That fellow will see that I am afraid."

And he did not ring, but made the fire himself. His hands trembled slightly, with a nervous shudder, when they touched anything. His brain was in a whirl; his troubled thoughts became fugitive, sudden, melancholy; a sort of intoxication seized on his spirit as if he had been drunk.

And ceaselessly he asked himself:

"What am I going to do? What will become of me?"

His whole body quivered, shaken by jerky tremblings. He got up, went to the window, and drew aside the curtains. The day was breaking, a summer's day. The rosy sky made rosy the city, the roofs, and the walls.

A great burst of light, like a caress from the rising sun, enveloped the awaking world; and with that glimmer, a sudden, enlivening, brutal hope seized on the heart of the viscount. How insane he was to have allowed himself to be so struck down by terror, even before anything was decided, before his seconds had met those of Georges Lamil, before he knew whether he was really to fight!

He made his toilet, dressed himself, and left the house with a firm step.

As he walked, he said to himself again and again:

"I must be firm, very firm. I must prove that I am not afraid."

His seconds, the marquis and the colonel, placed themselves at his disposal, and after warmly shaking his hand, discussed the conditions.

The colonel asked:

"Do you desire a serious duel?"

"Very serious," the viscount replied.

"You insist upon pistols?"

"Yes."

"Do you leave us at liberty to make the other arrangements?"

The viscount articulated with a dry, jerky voice:

"Twenty paces, firing at the word, lifting the arm instead of lowering it. Shots to be exchanged until some one is badly wounded."

"Those are excellent conditions," said the colonel, in a tone of satisfaction. "You are a good shot; the chances are all in your favour."

And they separated. The viscount returned home to wait for them. His agitation, which had been temporarily allayed, increased from moment to moment. He felt along his arms and legs, in his chest, a sort of shudder, an incessant vibration; he could not keep still, either sitting or standing. He had only a trace of moisture in his mouth, and he moved his tongue noisily every second, as if to unglue it from his palate.

He tried to breakfast, but he could not eat.

Thereupon it occurred to him to drink to renew his courage, and he ordered a small decanter of rum, from which he gulped down six little glasses, one after another. A warmth, like that caused by a burn, invaded his whole frame, followed as soon by a giddiness of the soul.

"I have found the way," he thought; "now it is all right."

But in an hour he had emptied the decanter, and his agitation became intolerable. He was conscious of a frantic longing to throw himself on the floor, to cry, to bite. Evening fell.

A ring at the bell caused him such a feeling of suffocation that he had not the strength to rise to receive his seconds.

He did not dare even to talk to them any longer—to say: "How do you do?" to utter a single word, for fear that they would divine everything from the trembling of his voice.

"Everything is arranged according to the conditions that you fixed," said the colonel.

"At first, your adversary claimed the privileges of the insulted party, but he gave way almost immediately and assented to everything. His seconds are two military men."

The viscount said:

"Thank you."

The marquis added:

"Excuse us if we stay but a moment, but we still have a thousand things to attend to. We must have a good doctor, as the duel is not to stop until somebody is severely wounded; and you know there's no trifling with bullets. We must arrange about the place, too—near a house to which the wounded man may be taken if necessary, etc.; in short, we still have two or three hours' work before us."

The viscount succeeded in articulating a second time:

"Thank you."

The colonel asked:

"You are all right? quite calm?"

"Yes, quite calm, thanks."

The two men withdrew.

When he was alone once more, it seemed to him that he was going mad. His servant having lighted the lamps, he seated himself at his table to write some letters. After tracing at the top of a page: "This is my Will," he rose with a jump and walked away, feeling incapable of putting two ideas together, of forming any resolution, of deciding any question whatsoever.

So he was really going to fight! It was no longer possible for him to avoid it. What on earth was taking place in him? He wanted to fight; his purpose and determination to do so were firmly fixed; and yet he knew full well that, despite all the effort of his mind and all the tension of his will, he would be unable to retain even the strength necessary to take him to the place of meeting. He tried to fancy the combat, his own attitude, and the bearing of his adversary.

From time to time, his teeth chattered with

a little dry noise. He tried to read, and took up Châteauvillard's duelling-code. Then he asked himself:

"Has my opponent frequented the shooting-galleries? Is he well-known? What 's his class? How can I find out?"

He remembered Baron de Vaux's book on pistol-shooters, and he looked it through from end to end. Georges Lamil's name was not mentioned. But if the fellow were not a good shot, he would not have assented so readily to that dangerous weapon and those fatal conditions! As he passed a table, he opened the case by Gastinne Renette, took out one of the pistols, then stood as if he were about to fire, and raised his arm. But he was trembling from head to foot, and the barrel shook in all directions.

Then he said to himself:

"It is impossible. I cannot fight like this!"

He regarded the little hole, black and deep, at the end of the barrel, the hole that spits

out death; he thought of the dishonour, of the whispered comments at the clubs, of the laughter in the salons, of the disdain of the women, of the allusions in the newspapers, of the insults which cowards would throw in his face.

He continued to gaze at the weapon, and as he raised the hammer, he saw the priming glitter beneath it like a little red flame. The pistol had been left loaded, by chance, by oversight. And he experienced a confused, inexplicable joy thereat.

If he did not display in the other's presence the calm and noble bearing suited to the occasion, he would be lost forever. He would be disgraced, branded with a sign of infamy, hunted from society! And that calm and bold bearing he could not command — he knew it, he felt it. And yet he was really brave, because he wanted to fight! He was brave, because —. The thought that grazed his mind was never completed; opening his mouth wide, he suddenly thrust the barrel of

the pistol into the very bottom of his throat and pressed upon the trigger. . . .

When his valet ran in, alarmed by the report, he found him on his back, dead. The blood had spattered the white paper on the table, and made a great red stain under the four words:

"This is my Will."

1885.

Vain Beauty

Vain Beauty

I

THE exceedingly stylish victoria, drawn by two magnificent black horses, was standing in front of the house. It was late in June, about half past five in the afternoon, and between the roofs of the buildings which enclosed the courtyard one could catch glimpses of a sky resplendent with light, heat, and vivacity.

The Countess de Mascaret appeared on the porch at the very moment that her husband, returning home, passed under the porte-cochère. He stopped a second or two to look at his wife, and he turned slightly pale. She was very beautiful, slender, and distinguished, with her long, oval face, her complexion like golden ivory, her large gray eyes, and her black hair; and she entered her

carriage without looking at him,—without seeming even to notice him, with such a peculiarly disdainful manner, that the ignoble jealousy with which he had been so long consumed bit him to the heart anew. He walked towards her and said, as he saluted her:

"Are you going for a drive?"

She allowed three words to pass her scornful lips.

"As you see!"

"To the Bois?"

"It is quite probable."

"May I be permitted to accompany you?"

"The carriage is yours."

With no indication of surprise at the tone in which she replied, he stepped in and seated himself by his wife's side, then gave the order:

"To the Bois."

The footman jumped to the box beside the coachman; and the horses, according to their custom, pranced and tossed their heads until they had turned into the street.

The husband and wife sat side by side without speaking. He tried to think how he could begin a conversation, but she so persistently maintained a frigid expression that he dared not.

At last he furtively moved his hand towards the countess's gloved one, and touched it as if by chance; but the gesture with which she withdrew her arm was so quick and so instinct with disgust that he was disquieted, notwithstanding his masterful and despotic ways.

"Gabrielle!" he murmured.

She asked, without turning her head:

"What do you want?"

"I think you are adorable."

She made no reply, but continued to lie back in the carriage with the air of an angry queen.

They were driving up the Champs-Élysées, towards the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile. The immense monument, at the end of the long avenue, reared its huge arch aloft against

a red sky. The sun seemed to be descending upon it, scattering a fiery dust along the horizon. And the stream of carriages, with gleams of sunlight on the copper, silver, and glass of the harnesses and lamps, flowed in a double current: in the direction of the Bois, and towards the city.

The Count de Mascaret began again:

"My dear Gabrielle."

At that, unable longer to contain herself, she rejoined in an exasperated tone:

"Oh! leave me in peace, I beg you! I no longer am at liberty to be alone, even in my carriage!"

He pretended not to hear, and continued:

"You have never been so lovely as you are to-day."

She was evidently at the end of her patience, and she retorted, with a wrath that was no longer held in check:

"You are unwise to notice it, for I swear that I will never again be yours."

Unquestionably he was stupefied and over-

whelmed; and, his natural violence resuming the upper hand, he hurled at her a "What does that mean?" which savoured more of the brutal master than of the loving husband.

She repeated in a low tone, although their servants could hear nothing amid the deafening rumble of wheels:

"What does it mean? what does it mean? Ah! I recognise you once more! So you want me to tell you, do you?"

"Yes."

"To tell you everything?"

"Yes."

"All that I have had on my heart since I became the victim of your barbarous egotism?"

He had turned crimson with astonishment and anger. He growled through his clenched teeth:

"Yes; say on."

He was a tall man, with broad shoulders and a bushy red beard; a fine-looking man, a gentleman; a man of the world, who was

esteemed an unexceptionable husband and an excellent father.

For the first time since they had left the house she turned towards him, and looked him squarely in the face:

"Well! you are going to hear some unpleasant things; but understand that I am prepared for everything, that I will risk everything, that I fear nothing — you to-day less than anybody."

He looked her in the eyes already trembling with passion.

"You are mad!" he muttered.

"No, but I do not propose to be the victim any longer of the hateful torture of maternity to which you have subjected me for eleven years! I propose to live at last the life of a woman in society, as I am entitled to do, as all women are entitled to do."

Turning suddenly pale again, he faltered:

"I don't understand."

"Yes, you do understand. It is three months now since the birth of my last child.

I am still beautiful, and, notwithstanding my burdens, my figure is still attractive; and, as you noticed just now when you saw me on your porch, you consider that it is time that I should again become enceinte."

"Why; you are talking nonsense!"

"No. I am thirty years old, I have seven children, and we have been married eleven years; and you hope that this state of things will continue ten years longer; then you will cease to be jealous."

He grasped her arm and squeezed it.

"I will not allow you to talk to me in this way any longer!"

"And I say that I will talk until I come to the end, until I have finished all that I have to say to you; and if you try to prevent me, I will raise my voice so that the two servants on the box will hear. I allowed you to get into the carriage for this express purpose, for I have them as witnesses who will force you to restrain yourself and to listen to me. Now listen. You have always been distasteful to

me, and I have always let you see that you were, for I have never lied, monsieur. You married me against my will; you compelled my parents, who were in straitened circumstances, to give me to you, because you were very rich. They forced me into it, although I wept. So you bought me; and as soon as I was in your power, as soon as I began to be a companion to you, all ready to become attached to you and to forget your former intimidation and coercion, to remember simply that it was my duty to be a faithful wife and to love you as dearly as it was possible for me to do, you became jealous, as no man ever was jealous before, with a spying, contemptible, shameful jealousy, degrading to you and insulting to me. Before we had been married eight months, you suspected me of all sorts of perfidy. You even went so far as to tell me so. What an outrage! And as you could not prevent me from being beautiful and attractive, from being called in salons, and in newspapers too, one of the prettiest

women in Paris, you tried to devise some scheme to repel my admirers, and you conceived the abominable idea of making me pass my life in a state of perpetual motherhood, until such time as I should be an object of disgust to all men. Oh! don't deny it! I did not understand for a long while, but at last I divined your plan. You even boasted of it to your sister, who told me, for she is fond of me; and she was sickened by your boorish vulgarity.

"Ah! do you remember our struggles, the doors broken down, and the locks forced? To what a life you have condemned me for eleven years — the life of a brood-mare confined in a stud! Then, as soon as I became enceinte, you, too, were disgusted with me, and for months at a time I did not see you. You sent me into the country, to the château of my family, to the green fields, to have my child. And when I reappeared, fresh and beautiful, not to be destroyed, still fascinating and still beset with attentions, hoping that I was at last

to be allowed to live for a while like a wealthy young woman who belongs in society, then jealousy would lay hold of you again, and you would begin to persecute me with the shameful and detestable passion from which you are suffering at this moment, here at my side. And it is not a desire to possess me—I would never have denied myself to you—but a desire to deform me.

"In addition to all this there is that mysterious and shocking thing which I was a long time in detecting—but I have become very skillful at following your acts and thoughts; you have become attached to your children by reason of the sense of security they have afforded you while I was bearing them. You have for them an affection compounded of all your aversion for me, of all your base fears, temporarily set at rest, and of your joy at seeing me advance in motherhood.

"Ah! how many times I have been conscious of that joy, have seen it in your eyes and divined it in your manner! You love

your children as triumphs, not as being of your blood. They are triumphs over me, over my beauty, my youth, my charm, over the compliments that men paid to me or whispered to one another without addressing them to me. And you are proud of them; you put yourself on exhibition with them; you take them in your break to the Bois de Boulogne, or to ride on donkeys at Montmorency. You take them to matinées at the theatre so that people may see you surrounded by them, and say: 'What a model father!' and repeat it——"

He had seized her wrist with brutal violence and gripped it so hard that she broke off, her throat torn by a shriek.

And he said to her in an undertone:

"I love my children, do you understand? The admission you have just made is shameful, coming from a mother. But you are mine. I am the master—your master; I can demand of you what I choose, when I choose; and I have the law on my side."

He tried to crush her fingers with the vise-like pressure of his muscular wrist. She, livid with pain, struggled vainly to withdraw her hand from that vise which was bruising it; the agony made her gasp, and tears came to her eyes.

"You see that I am the master," he said, "and that I am the stronger."

He relaxed his grip a little. She said:

"Do you think that I am religious?"

"Why, yes," he faltered, taken by surprise.

"Do you think that I believe in God?"

"Why, yes."

"Or that I could possibly lie if I took an oath before an altar in which the body of the Christ is enclosed?"

"No."

"Will you go with me to a church?"

"What for?"

"You will see. Will you come?"

"If you insist upon it, yes."

She raised her voice and called: "Philippe!"

The coachman, bending his neck slightly, without taking his eyes from his horses, seemed to turn his ear alone towards his mistress, who continued:

"Go to the church of Saint Philippe du Roule."

And the victoria, which had just reached the entrance to the Bois de Boulogne, returned to Paris.

The husband and wife did not exchange a single word during the drive. And when the carriage drew up in front of the doorway of the church, Madame de Mascaret hastily alighted and entered, followed at a short distance by the count.

She went without pausing to the chancel-rail, and, falling on her knees beside a chair, hid her face in her hands and prayed. She prayed a long while, and he, standing behind her, discovered at last that she was weeping. She wept noiselessly, as women weep in great and poignant sorrow. There was a sort of undulation throughout her whole body,

ending with a little sob, concealed and stifled behind her fingers.

But the Count de Mascaret considered that the scene had lasted too long, and he touched her on the shoulder. That touch roused her like a burn. She stood up and looked at him eye to eye.

"This is what I have to say to you. I am afraid of nothing; you may do what you like. You may kill me if you please. One of your children is not yours, — just one. I swear it before God who hears me. It was my only possible revenge for your outrageous masculine tyranny, for this compulsory labour of child-bearing to which you have condemned me. Who was my lover? You shall never know. You will suspect everybody, but you will never discover. I gave myself to him without love and without enjoyment, solely to deceive you. And he made me a mother, too. Which child is his? You shall never know. I have seven—try to guess which one it is. I expected to tell you this later, much

later, for one has never fully revenged oneself on a man, by being false to him, until he knows it. You have forced me to make my confession to-day; I have done."

And she fled through the church, towards the open street-door, expecting to hear behind her the swift step of her defied husband, and to sink to the ground beneath the bludgeon-like blow of his fist.

But she heard nothing, and reached her carriage in safety. She leaped in, quivering with apprehension, panting with fear, and called to the coachman:

"To the house."

The horses trotted rapidly away.

II

THE Countess de Mascaret, having shut herself into her room, awaited the hour of dinner as a person condemned to death awaits the hour of his execution. What would he do? Had he come home? Despotic, hot-tempered, capable of any sort of

violence as he was, what had he planned, what had he prepared, what had he determined to do? There was not a sound in the house, and she kept glancing at the hands of the clock. Her maid came to dress her for the evening; then she went away.

The clock struck eight, and almost on the instant some one knocked twice on her door.

"Come in."

The butler appeared, and said:

"Madame is served."

"Has the count returned?"

"Yes, madame the countess; monsieur the count is in the dining-room."

For a second she thought of arming herself with a little revolver, which she had bought not long before, in anticipation of the drama that she was preparing in her mind. But she reflected that all the children would be there; and she took nothing except a vial of salts.

When she entered the dining-room, her husband stood beside his chair, waiting for her. They exchanged a slight bow and took

their seats. Then the children took their places. The three sons, with their tutor, Abbé Marin, were at their mother's right; the three daughters, with their English governess, Mademoiselle Smith, were at her left. The youngest child, three months old, remained in its room with its nurse.

The three girls—the oldest was ten—were all fair, and, clothed in blue dresses trimmed with bits of white lace, resembled exquisite dolls. The youngest was not yet three. All of them were already pretty, and promised to become as lovely as their mother.

The three sons, two of whom had chestnut hair, while the eldest, aged nine, was already very dark, seemed likely to grow to be strong men, tall and broad-shouldered. The whole family seemed to be of the same vigorous and healthy blood.

The abbé asked a blessing, as usual when there were no guests; for the children did not come to the table when strangers were present. Then they began their dinner.

The countess, mastered by an emotion which she had not anticipated, kept her eyes lowered, while the count scrutinised, now the three boys and now the three girls, with perplexed eyes roving from one to the other, in an agony of suspense. Suddenly, as he placed his glass on the table, he broke the stem and the red liquid poured over the cloth. At the slight noise caused by that trivial accident, the countess was so startled that she rose from her chair. For the first time they looked at each other. After that, from time to time, despite themselves, despite the fluttering of their flesh and their hearts, which followed every meeting of their eyes, they constantly discharged at each other glances like pistol-shots.

The abbé, conscious of some trouble of which he could not imagine the cause, tried to start a conversation. He scattered subjects by the way, but not one of his fruitless attempts caused an idea to bloom, or gave birth to a word.

The countess, with feminine tact, followed the instincts of a woman of the world, and tried twice or thrice to answer him; but in vain. She could not find words in the confusion of her mind; and her voice almost frightened her in the silence of the vast room, where there was no sound save the clatter of silver and plates.

Suddenly her husband leaned forward, and said to her:

"Here, among your children, do you swear to the truth of what you told me this afternoon?"

The hatred fermenting in her veins instantly gave her courage, and, answering that question with the same vehemence with which she answered his glance, she raised both her hands, the right towards her sons and the left towards her daughters, and said in a steady, determined, unfaltering tone:

"By the heads of my children, I swear that I told you the truth!"

He rose, and, throwing his napkin on the

table with an exasperated gesture, he turned, pushed his chair against the wall, and left the room without a word.

Whereupon she, drawing a long breath, as if after a first victory, added in a more tranquil voice:

"Do not pay any attention, darlings; your papa has just had a bitter disappointment, and he is still suffering a great deal. In a few days it will all be gone."

Thereupon she conversed with the abbé, she chatted with Mademoiselle Smith; she lavished upon all her children loving words and the sweet maternal caresses which make young hearts swell with joy.

When the dinner was at an end, she went to the salon with her whole brood. She led the older ones on to chatter, told stories to the younger ones, and when the hour arrived for them all to go to bed, she gave them each a long kiss; then, having sent them off to sleep, she went alone to her bedroom.

She waited, for she had no doubt that he

would come. Her children being far away, she determined to defend her human skin as she had defended her social life; and she concealed in her pocket, loaded, the little revolver which she had bought a few days before.

The hours dragged on, and the clock marked them as they passed. All the noises in the house died away. Only the cabs continued their vague rumbling through the streets, muffled and distant through the hangings of the walls.

She waited, nervous and determined, with no fear of him now, ready for anything and almost triumphant, for she had found something that would torture him every instant of his life.

But the first rays of dawn stole through the fringe of her curtains, and he had not come to her room. Thereupon, dumb with amazement, she realised that he would not come. Having turned the key in her door, and shot the bolt which she had recently had put on, she at length went to bed, and lay there,

open-eyed, thinking, unable to understand, at a loss to guess what he proposed to do.

Her maid, when she brought her tea, handed her a letter from her husband. He informed her that he was starting on rather a long journey, and added, in a postscript, that his notary would supply her with the necessary funds for all her expenses.

III

IT was at the Opera, during an entr'acte of *Robert le Diable.* In the orchestra, the men were standing up, with their hats on, their low-cut waistcoats displaying a broad expanse of white shirt-front, in which gold and pearl studs gleamed; and they gazed at the boxes filled with décolletée, bediamonded and bepearled women, blooming luxuriantly in that brilliantly illuminated hothouse, where beauty of face and ivory whiteness of shoulder seemed to be on exhibition amid the music and the human voices.

Vain Beauty

Two friends, their backs turned to the orchestra, examined, as they talked, that gallery of fashion, that display of true or false charms, of jewelry, of luxury, and of ostentation which stretched in a circle about the great auditorium.

One of them, Roger de Salins, said to his companion, Bernard Grandin:

"Just look at the Countess de Mascaret, how beautiful she still is!"

The other turned his glass towards a box opposite, upon a tall woman, who appeared to be still very young, and whose brilliant beauty seemed to appeal to eyes in every corner of the hall. Her pale complexion, with its ivory tint, gave her the aspect of a statue; while in her hair, black as night, a slender diadem, shaped like a rainbow and sprinkled with diamonds, resembled a Milky Way.

When he had gazed at her for some time, Bernard Grandin replied in a playful tone, but with sincere conviction:

"I should say that she is beautiful!"

"How old is she now?"

"Wait—I will tell you exactly. I have known her since she was a child. I saw her make her first appearance in society as a young woman. She is thirty—thirty—thirty-six."

"Is it possible?"

"I am sure of it."

"She looks twenty-five."

"And she has had seven children."

"It is incredible."

"And all seven of them are living, and she is a very good mother. I go now and then to the house, which is very attractive, quiet, and salutary. It presents the phenomenon of family life in society."

"How extraordinary! And there has never been any talk about her?"

"Never."

"But her husband? He is peculiar, is he not?"

"Yes, and no. There may have been a little drama between them, one of those little

family dramas, which people suspect, which no one ever knows about, but at which one can guess pretty nearly."

"What was it?"

"I have no idea myself. Mascaret is a great rake to-day, after being a model husband. So long as he continued to be that, he had a shocking disposition, quick to take offence, and surly. Since he has been celebrating, he has become very indifferent, but you would say that he had something worrying him — some trouble, remorse, perhaps; he is fast growing old."

Thereupon the two friends philosophised for some minutes concerning the hidden, unavowed suffering to which differences of temperament, or, it may be, physical antipathies, unnoticed at first, may give birth in a family.

Roger de Salins, still gazing at Madame de Mascaret, repeated:

"It is incomprehensible that that woman has had seven children."

"She did have them in eleven years. After that, at the age of thirty, she put an end to her period of child-bearing, and entered upon the brilliant period of display, which seems to be by no means near its end."

"Poor wives!"

"Why do you pity them?"

"Why? Just think, my dear fellow! Eleven years of motherhood for a woman like that! What a hell on earth! It means the sacrifice of all her youth, all her beauty, all her hopes of social success, all the poetic dreams of a brilliant life, to that shocking law of reproduction which makes of the ordinary wife simply a machine for bearing children."

"What would you have?—it is Nature."

"True; but I say that Nature is an enemy, that we must always fight against Nature, for she is constantly turning us back to the animal instincts. Whatever is neat, attractive, refined, ideal, on earth is not put there by God, but by man, by the human brain. It is we who have introduced a little grace, beauty,

unfamiliar charm, and mystery into creation, by singing of it, by explaining it, by admiring it in poets, by idealising it in artists, by interpreting it in scientists, who often make mistakes, but who discover ingenious causes for phenomena. God created only mortals of coarse fibre, full of germs of disease, who, after a few years of bestial splendour, grow old in infirmity, with all the ugliness and all the impotence of human decrepitude. He made them, it would seem, for no other purpose than to reproduce themselves disgustingly and then to die, like the ephemeral insects of a summer evening. I said 'to reproduce themselves disgustingly,' and I insist upon the words. In truth, what can be more vile, more repellent than that filthy and ridiculous process of reproduction against which all refined natures always have rebelled and always will rebel? Since all the organs devised by that economical and malevolent Creator serve two purposes, why did he not choose others, which are not unclean and

polluted, to be entrusted with that consecrated mission, the noble and most elevating of mortal functions? The mouth, which supplies the body with material sustenance, also diffuses words and thoughts. The flesh is recuperated by it, and at the same time ideas are communicated by it. The nose, which supplies the lungs with life-giving air, conducts to the brain all the odours of the earth: the perfume of flowers, trees, woods, and sea. The ear, which enables us to converse with our fellow men, has made it possible for us to invent music, to create dreams, happiness, infinity, aye, even physical pleasure, with sounds. But one would say that the crafty and cynical Creator had determined to forbid man ever to ennoble, beautify, and idealise his relations with womankind. Man, however, discovered love, which is not half bad as a retort to the cunning God, and he has arrayed it so enticingly in literary poesy that woman often forgets the contact which she is forced to undergo. Those among us

who are powerless to deceive themselves by working themselves into a frenzy, have invented vice and the refinements of debauchery, which is another way of fooling God, and of doing homage, shameless homage, to beauty."

"But the normal human being makes children like a beast mated by law. Just look at that woman! Is it not abominable to think that that jewel, that pearl, born to be lovely, admired, courted, and adored, should pass eleven years of her life supplying Count de Mascaret with heirs?"

Bernard Grandin replied with a laugh:

"There is a good deal of truth in all that; but few people would understand you."

Salins grew warmer.

"Do you know my idea of God?" he said: "A monstrous creative organ, unfamiliar to us, which sows worlds by millions in space, as a single fish lays eggs in the sea. He creates because it is His function as God, but He is ignorant of what He is doing; stupidly prolific,

with no idea of the innumerable combinations produced by His scattered germs. Human thought is a lucky little accident of his random fertilisation — a local, temporary, unforeseen accident, destined to disappear with the earth, and to start anew perhaps, here or elsewhere, with the fresh combinations of never-ending recommencements. We owe to that little accident of intelligence the fact that we are very badly off in this world, which was not made for us, which was not prepared to receive, lodge, feed, and satisfy sentient beings; and we also owe to it the having to struggle incessantly, when we are really refined and civilised, against what are still called the plans of Providence."

Grandin, who was listening attentively, prepared by long experience for the startling outbursts of his imagination, asked him:

"So you think that human thought is a spontaneous product of blind, divine parturition?"

"Parbleu, yes! a chance working of the

nervous centres of our brain, like the unexpected chemical processes due to new combinations; also like an electric shock produced by the unintentional proximity or contact of substances; in fact, like all the phenomena produced by the endless and fruitful fermentations of living matter.

"Why, my dear fellow, the proof of it is manifest to any one who chooses to look about him. If human thought, designed by, created by, a Creator who knew what He was doing, had been intended to be what it has become,—so different from the thought and resignation of beasts—exacting, inquisitive, excited, never at rest, would not the world created to receive the beings that we are to-day have been something more than this uncomfortable little park for insects, this lettuce-field, this rustic kitchen-garden, rock-strewn and spherical, where your improvident Providence intended that we should live unclothed, in caverns or under trees, feeding on the flesh of slain beasts, our brethren, or

on raw vegetables ripened by the sun and the rain?

"Why, a second's reflection is enough to satisfy one that this earth was not made for creatures such as we. That thought, matured and developed by a miraculous nervous process in the cells of our brain, helpless, ignorant, and confused as it is and as it will always remain, makes of all of us intellectual beings, wretched exiles on this earth forever.

"Just look upon this earth, as God gave it to those who dwell upon it. Was it not clearly arranged, planted, and wooded for animals, and for animals alone? What is there for us? Nothing. And for them, everything: caverns, trees, leaves, springs, homes, food, and drink. So that exacting people like myself never consider themselves well off. Only those who resemble the brutes are content and satisfied. But the rest, the poets, dreamers, investigators, restless spirits — ah! the poor wretches!

"I eat cabbages and carrots, *sacrebleu!* and

onions, turnips, and radishes, because we have been compelled to accustom ourselves to them, yes, even to like them, and because nothing else grows; but they are food for rabbits and goats, as grass and clover are food for horses and cows. When I look at the stalks in a field of ripe grain, I have no doubt that they sprouted in the ground for the bills of blackbirds or larks, but not for my mouth. When I chew bread, I am robbing the birds, just as I am robbing the weasel and the fox when I eat chickens. Quails, pigeons, and partridges are the natural prey of the hawk; the sheep, the kid, and the ox are the prey of the great carnivora, rather than flesh fattened to be served on our tables, roasted, with truffles that have been dug specially for us by the pigs.

"Why, my dear fellow, the animals have to do nothing in order to live on this earth. They are at home, boarded and lodged; they have only to browse and to hunt, or to eat one another in accordance with their instincts; for

God had no prevision of gentleness and peaceful manners; He foresaw only the death of creatures bent upon destroying and devouring one another.

"As for ourselves—o-ho! it has required an abundance of labour, effort, patience, invention, imagination, industry, skill, and genius on our part, to make this soil of roots and stones partially inhabitable. Just consider what we have done, in spite of Nature, in opposition to Nature, to install ourselves here in a middling fashion, scarcely decent, scarcely comfortable, scarcely refined, and quite unworthy of us!

"And the more civilised, intellectual, refined we are, the more we have to fight against and subdue the animal instinct which represents the will of God in us.

"Consider that we have had to invent civilisation, from beginning to end, which includes so many things, so many, many things, of all sorts, from socks to the telephone. Think of all that you see every day,

of all the things that we use for every purpose. To lighten our lot as brutes, we have invented and manufactured everything, beginning with houses; delicious things to eat, too, sauces, sweetmeats, pastry, wines, liqueurs; fabrics, clothes, jewels, beds, quilts, carriages, railways, innumerable machines; we have, moreover, discovered the sciences and the arts, writing and versifying. Yes, we have created the arts—poetry, music, painting. Everything in the ideal world comes from us; and all the coquetry of life, too—women's dress, and the talents of men, who have succeeded at last in beautifying in some slight degree in our eyes, in making less bare, less monotonous, and less hard, the existence of simple reproducers of our kind, for which alone Divine Providence gave us life.

"Look about this theatre. Is there not here a human world created by us, unforeseen by everlasting Destiny, undreamed of by it, comprehensible to our minds alone; a refined,

sensuous, intellectual diversion, invented solely by and for the discontented, restless little beasts that we are?

"Look at that woman, Madame de Mascaret. God made her to live in a cave, unclothed, or enveloped in skins of beasts. Is she not better thus? But, speaking of her, does any one know how and why her brute of a husband, having such a companion by his side, and especially after being boor enough to make her a mother seven times over, suddenly dropped her to run after hussies?"

Grandin replied:

"Why, my dear fellow, this is probably the only reason: he finally discovered that it cost him too much always to sleep at home. By reasoning based on domestic economy, he has arrived at the same principles which you put forward as a philosopher."

The three blows were struck for the last act. The two friends turned, took off their hats, and sat down.

IV

THE Count and Countess de Mascaret sat side by side without speaking, in the coupé that took them home after the performance at the Opera. But suddenly the husband said to his wife:

"Gabrielle!"

"What do you want?"

"Don't you think that this has lasted long enough?"

"What?"

"The fiendish torture to which you have subjected me for six years."

"What do you expect? I can do nothing."

"Tell me which one it is."

"Never."

"Just consider that I cannot look at my children, feel them about me, without having my heart crushed by this doubt. Tell me which one it is, and I swear that I will forgive, and that I will treat that one like the others."

"I have no right to do it."

"Don't you see that I can no longer endure this life, this thought that is gnawing at my heart, and this question which I ask myself every minute of the day, and which tortures me every time that I look at them? I am going mad."

She asked:

"Have you suffered very much?"

"Frightfully. But for that would I ever have endured the horror of living by your side, and the even greater horror of feeling, of knowing that there is one among them whom I cannot detect, and who keeps me from loving the others?"

She asked again:

"Then you have really suffered much?"

He replied in a subdued and grief-stricken voice:

"Why, don't I tell you every day that it is intolerable torture to me? Otherwise, should I have returned, should I have lived in this house, with you and with them, if I did not

love them? Ah! you have behaved outrageously to me. My love for my children is the only affection of my heart, as you well know. I am to them a father of ancient times, as I was to you the husband of the patriarchal families; for I am still a man of instinct, a man of nature, a man of the olden time. Yes, I admit that you made me savagely jealous, because you are a woman of another race, of another nature, with other needs. Ah! I shall never forget the things that you said to me. From that day I have never cared for you. I did not kill you, because then I should have had no possible means of discovering which of our—of your children is not mine. I have waited, but I have suffered more than you can believe; for I no longer dare to love them, except possibly the two eldest ones; I dare not look at them, call them, embrace them; I cannot take one of them on my knee without asking myself: 'Is n't it this one?' I have been respectful, and even mild and pleasant with you

for six years. Tell me the truth, and I swear that I will do no harm."

In the darkness of the carriage, he thought that he could feel that she was moved, and with a conviction that she would speak at last, he added:

"I beg you, I implore you!"

She murmured:

"I have been guiltier than you think, perhaps. But I could not, I could not endure that hateful life of child-bearing any longer. I had but one means of driving you away from my bed. I lied before God, I lied with my hand over my children's heads, for I have never been false to you."

He seized her arm in the darkness, and pressing it as he had done on the terrible day of their drive in the Bois, he faltered:

"Is that true?"

"It is true."

But he, beside himself with suffering, groaned:

"Ah! I shall be tortured now by new doubts,

which will never be solved. When did you lie, to-day or long ago? How can I believe you now? How believe a woman after such a performance? I shall never know what to think. I should have preferred to have you say: 'It is Jacques,' or: 'It is Jeanne.'"

The carriage drove into the courtyard. When it stopped in front of the porch the count alighted first, and, as always, offered his wife his arm to ascend the steps.

When they reached the first floor, he said:

"May I speak with you a few moments more?"

"Certainly," she replied.

They entered a small salon, where a footman, somewhat surprised, lighted candles.

When they were alone, the count continued:

"How am I to find out the truth! I have implored you a thousand times to speak, but you have persisted in remaining mute, immovable, impenetrable, inexorable; and now to-day you tell me that you lied. Is it possible

that you have allowed me to believe such a thing for six years? No, it must be to-day that you lie. Why, I have no idea—from compassion for me perhaps."

She replied with a sincere and impressive manner:

"Why, if I had not done it, I should have had four more children in the past six years."

"And it is a mother who talks thus!" he cried.

"Ah!" said she, "I am not in the least degree conscious of being the mother of unborn children; it is enough for me to be the mother of those whom I have, and to love them with all my heart. I am—we are women of a civilised world, monsieur. We are no longer, and we refuse to be, simply females who repopulate the earth."

She rose, but he seized her hands.

"A word, a single word, Gabrielle. Tell me the truth."

"I have just told you the truth. I have never been unfaithful to you."

Vain Beauty

He looked her squarely in the face—such a lovely face, with its gray eyes like cold bits of sky. In her dark head-dress, in that dense night of black hair, gleamed the diadem sprinkled with diamonds, like a Milky Way. At that moment he suddenly felt, he felt by a sort of intuition, that that creature was not simply a woman destined to perpetuate his race, but the strange and mysterious product of all our complicated desires, heaped up within us by the lapse of centuries, turned aside from their original, divine purpose, straying towards a mystic, dimly glimpsed, intangible beauty. There are some who bloom solely for our dreams, adorned with all the poesy, the ideal splendour, the coquetry, and the fascination with which civilisation has encompassed woman, that statue of living flesh which quickens immaterial appetites like the fever of sensuality.

The husband remained standing before her, stupefied by that tardy and obscure discovery, realising vaguely the cause of his

former jealousy, and hardly comprehending it all.

He said at last:

"I believe you. I feel that you are not lying at this moment; and, in truth, it has always seemed to me before that you were lying."

She held out her hand.

"Then we are friends?"

He took her hand and kissed it, replying:

"We are friends. Thanks, Gabrielle."

Then he left the room, still looking at her, marvelling that she was still so lovely, and conscious of the birth within him of a strange sensation, more to be dreaded perhaps than the old-fashioned, simple love!

1890.

The Piece of String

The Piece of String

To Harry Alis.

ON all the roads about Goderville the peasants and their wives were coming towards the town, for it was market-day. The men walked at an easy gait, the whole body thrown forward with every movement of their long, crooked legs, misshapen by hard work, by the bearing down on the plough which at the same time causes the left shoulder to rise and the figure to slant; by the mowing of the grain, which makes one hold his knees apart in order to obtain a firm footing; by all the slow and laborious tasks of the fields. Their starched blue blouses, glossy as if varnished, adorned at the neck and wrists with a bit of white stitchwork, puffed out about their bony chests like balloons on the point of taking flight, from which protruded a head, two arms, and two feet.

Some of them led a cow or a calf at the end of a rope. And their wives, walking behind the beast, lashed it with a branch still covered with leaves, to hasten its pace. They carried on their arms great baskets, from which heads of chickens or of ducks were thrust forth. And they walked with a shorter and quicker step than their men, their stiff, lean figures wrapped in scanty shawls pinned over their flat breasts, their heads enveloped in a white linen cloth close to the hair, with a cap over all.

Then a *char-à-bancs* passed, drawn by a jerky-paced nag, with two men seated side by side shaking like jelly, and a woman behind, who clung to the side of the vehicle to lessen the rough jolting.

On the square at Goderville there was a crowd, a medley of men and beasts. The horns of the cattle, the high hats, with a long, hairy nap, of the wealthy peasants, and the head-dresses of the peasant women, appeared on the surface of the throng. And the

sharp, shrill, high-pitched voices formed an incessant, uncivilised uproar, over which soared at times a roar of laughter from the powerful chest of a sturdy yokel, or the prolonged bellow of a cow fastened to the wall of a house.

There was an all-pervading smell of the stable, of milk, of the dunghill, of hay, and of perspiration,—that acrid, disgusting odour of man and beast peculiar to country people.

Master Hauchecorne, of Bréauté, had just arrived at Goderville, and was walking towards the square, when he saw a bit of string on the ground. Master Hauchecorne, economical like every true Norman, thought that it was well to pick up everything that might be of use; and he stooped painfully, for he suffered with rheumatism. He took the piece of slender cord from the ground, and was about to roll it up carefully, when he saw Master Malandain, the harness-maker, standing in his doorway and looking at him. They had formerly had trouble on the subject of a

halter, and had remained at odds, being both inclined to bear malice. Master Hauchecorne felt a sort of shame at being seen thus by his enemy, fumbling in the mud for a bit of string. He hurriedly concealed his treasure in his blouse, then in his breeches'-pocket; then he pretended to look on the ground for something else, which he did not find; and finally he went on towards the market, his head thrust forward, bent double by his pains.

He lost himself at once in the slow-moving, shouting crowd, kept in a state of excitement by the interminable bargaining. The peasants felt of the cows, went away, returned, sorely perplexed, always afraid of being cheated, never daring to make up their minds, watching the vendor's eye, striving incessantly to detect the tricks of the man and the defect in the beast.

The women, having placed their great baskets at their feet, took out their fowls, which lay on the ground, their legs tied together, with frightened eyes and scarlet combs.

They listened to offers, adhered to their prices, short of speech and impassive of face; or else, suddenly deciding to accept the lower price offered, they would call out to the customer as he walked slowly away:

"All right, Mast' Anthime. You can have it."

Then, little by little, the square became empty, and when the Angelus struck midday those who lived too far away to go home betook themselves to the various inns.

At Jourdain's the common room was full of customers, as the great yard was full of vehicles of every sort — carts, cabriolets, *char-à-bancs*, tilburys, unnamable carriages, shapeless, patched, with their shafts reaching heavenward like arms, or with their noses in the ground and their tails in the air.

The vast fireplace, full of clear flame, cast an intense heat against the backs of the row on the right of the table. Three spits were revolving, laden with chickens, pigeons, and legs of mutton; and a delectable odour of

roast meat, and of gravy dripping from the browned skin, came forth from the hearth, stirred the guests to merriment, and made their mouths water.

All the aristocracy of the plough ate there, at Mast' Jourdain's, the inn-keeper and horse-trader — a shrewd rascal who had money.

The dishes passed and were soon emptied, like the jugs of yellow cider. Every one told of his affairs, his sales, and his purchases. They inquired about the crops. The weather was good for green stuffs, but a little wet for wheat.

Suddenly a drum rolled in the yard, in front of the house. In an instant everybody was on his feet, save a few indifferent ones; and they all ran to the door and windows, with their mouths still full and napkins in hand.

Having finished his long tattoo, the public crier shouted in a jerky voice, making his pauses in the wrong places:

"The people of Goderville, and all those present at the market are informed that be-

tween—nine and ten o'clock this morning on the Beuzeville—road, a black leather wallet was lost, containing five hundred—francs, and business papers. The finder is requested to carry it to—the mayor's office at once, or to Master Fortuné Houlbrèque of Manneville. A reward of twenty francs will be paid."

Then he went away. They heard once more in the distance the muffled roll of the drum and the indistinct voice of the crier.

Then they began to talk about the incident, reckoning Master Houlbrèque's chance of finding or not finding his wallet.

And the meal went on.

They were finishing their coffee when the corporal of gendarmes appeared in the doorway.

He inquired:

"Is Master Hauchecorne of Bréauté here?"

Master Hauchecorne, who was seated at the farther end of the table, answered:

"Here I am."

And the corporal added:

"Master Hauchecorne, will you be kind enough to go to the mayor's office with me? Monsieur the mayor would like to speak to you."

The peasant, surprised and disturbed, drank his *petit verre* at one swallow, rose, and even more bent than in the morning, for the first steps after each rest were particularly painful, he started off, repeating:

"Here I am, here I am."

And he followed the brigadier.

The mayor was waiting for him, seated in an arm-chair. He was the local notary, a stout, solemn-faced man, given to pompous speeches.

"Master Hauchecorne," he said, "you were seen this morning, on the Beuzeville road, to pick up the wallet lost by Master Houlbrèque of Manneville."

The rustic, dumfounded, stared at the mayor, already alarmed by this suspicion which had fallen upon him, although he failed to understand it.

"I, I—I picked up that wallet?"

"Yes, you."

"On my word of honour, I did n't ever so much as see it."

"You were seen."

"They saw me, me? Who was it saw me?"

"Monsieur Malandain, the harness-maker."

Thereupon the old man remembered and understood; and flushing with anger, he cried:

"Ah! he saw me, did he, that sneak? He saw me pick up this string, look, m'sieu' mayor."

And, fumbling in the depths of his pocket, he produced the little piece of cord.

But the mayor was incredulous and shook his head.

"You won't make me believe, Master Hauchecorne, that Monsieur Malandain, who is a man deserving of credit, mistook this string for a wallet."

The peasant, in a rage, raised his hand, spit to one side to pledge his honour, and said:

"It 's God's own truth, the sacred truth, all the same, m'sieu' mayor. I say it again, by my soul and my salvation."

"After picking it up," rejoined the mayor, "you hunted a long while in the mud, to see if some piece of money had n't fallen out."

The good man was suffocated with wrath and fear.

"If any one can tell—if any one can tell lies like that, to ruin an honest man! If any one can say ——"

To no purpose did he protest; he was not believed.

He was confronted with Monsieur Malandain, who repeated and maintained his declaration. They insulted each other for a whole hour. At his own request, Master Hauchecorne was searched. They found nothing on him. At last the mayor, being sorely perplexed, discharged him, but warned him that he proposed to inform the prosecuting attorney's office and to ask for orders.

The Piece of String

The news had spread. On leaving the mayor's office, the old man was surrounded and questioned with serious or bantering curiosity, in which, however, there was no trace of indignation. And he began to tell the story of the string. They did not believe him. They laughed.

He went his way, stopping his acquaintances, repeating again and again his story and his protestations, showing his pockets turned inside out, to prove that he had nothing.

They said to him:

"You old rogue, *va!*"

And he lost his temper, lashing himself into a rage, feverish with excitement, desperate because he was not believed, at a loss what to do, and still telling his story.

Night came. He must needs go home. He started with three neighbours, to whom he pointed out the place where he had picked up the bit of string: and all the way he talked of his misadventure.

During the evening he made the circuit of

the village of Bréauté, in order to tell everybody about it. He found none but incredulous listeners.

He was ill over it all night.

The next afternoon, about one o'clock, Marius Paumelle, a farm-hand employed by Master Breton, a farmer of Ymauville, restored the wallet and its contents to Master Houlbrèque of Manneville.

The man claimed that he had found it on the road; but, being unable to read, he had carried it home and given it to his employer.

The news soon became known in the neighbourhood; Master Hauchecorne was informed of it. He started out again at once, and began to tell his story, now made complete by the dénouement. He was triumphant.

"What made me feel bad," he said, "was n't so much the thing itself, you understand, but the lying. There 's nothing hurts you so much as being blamed for lying."

All day long he talked of his adventure; he told it on the roads to people who passed;

at the wine-shop to people who were drinking; and after church on the following Sunday. He even stopped strangers to tell them about it. His mind was at rest now, and yet something embarrassed him, although he could not say just what it was. People seemed to laugh while they listened to him. They did not seem convinced. He felt as if remarks were made behind his back.

On Tuesday of the next week, he went to market at Goderville, impelled solely by the longing to tell his story.

Malandain, standing in his doorway, began to laugh when he saw him coming. Why?

He accosted a farmer from Criquetot, who did not let him finish, but poked him in the pit of his stomach, and shouted in his face: "Go on, you old fox!" Then he turned on his heel.

Master Hauchecorne was speechless, and more and more disturbed. Why did he call him "old fox"?

When he was seated at the table, in Jour-

dain's inn, he set about explaining the affair once more.

A horse-trader from Montivilliers called out to him:

"Nonsense, nonsense, you old dodger! I know all about your string!"

"But they 've found the wallet!" faltered Hauchecorne.

"None of that, old boy; there 's one who finds it, and there 's one who carries it back. I don't know just how you did it, but I understand you."

The peasant was fairly stunned. He understood at last. He was accused of having sent the wallet back by a confederate, an accomplice.

He tried to protest. The whole table began to laugh.

He could not finish his dinner, but left the inn amid a chorus of jeers.

He returned home, shamefaced and indignant, suffocated by wrath, by confusion, and all the more cast down because, with his

Norman cunning, he was quite capable of doing the thing with which he was charged, and even of boasting of it as a shrewd trick. He had a confused idea that his innocence was impossible to establish, his craftiness being so well known. And he was cut to the heart by the injustice of the suspicion.

Thereupon he began once more to tell of the adventure, making the story longer each day, adding each time new arguments, more forcible protestations, more solemn oaths, which he devised and prepared in his hours of solitude, his mind being wholly engrossed by the story of the string. The more complicated his defence and the more subtle his reasoning, the less he was believed.

"Those are a liar's reasons," people said behind his back.

He realised it; he gnawed his nails, and exhausted himself in vain efforts.

He grew perceptibly thinner.

Now the jokers asked him to tell the story of *The Piece of String* for their amusement, as

a soldier who has seen service is asked to tell about his battles. His mind, attacked at its source, grew feebler.

Late in December he took to his bed.

In the first days of January he died, and in the delirium of the death-agony, he protested his innocence, repeating:

"A little piece of string—a little piece of string—see, here it is, m'sieu' mayor."

1884.

Moonlight

Moonlight

THE Abbé Marignan[1] bore his fighting title well. He was a tall, thin priest, always in a state of mental exaltation, and without guile. All his beliefs were fixed, with never a wavering. He honestly believed that he knew his God, that he could fathom His desires, His will, His purposes.

When he strode along the path of his little country rectory, a question sometimes arose in his mind: "Why did God do thus?" And he persistently sought the reason, mentally assuming God's place; and he almost always found it. He would not have murmured, in an outburst of pious humility: "O Lord, Thy designs are past finding out!" He said to

[1] Marignano (or Melegnano), a town in the province of Milan, Italy, has been the scene of two great French victories: that of François I. over the Swiss in 1515; and of the French over the Austrians in 1859.—[Trans.]

himself: "I am God's servant; it is my duty to know the reasons for His actions, and to divine them if I know them not."

Everything in nature seemed to him to be created with absolute and marvellous logicality. The "why" and the "because" always balanced. The dawn was made that our waking might be cheerful, the day to ripen the crops, the rain to water them, the evenings to prepare for slumber, and the dark nights to sleep.

The four seasons provided perfectly for all the necessities of agriculture; and the priest was utterly unable to harbour such a thought as that Nature acts without design, and that all living things are subjected to the stern necessities of time, of climate, and of matter.

But he hated woman; he hated her unconscionably, and instinctively despised her. He often repeated the words of Christ: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" And he would add: "One would think that God Himself was displeased with that work of His

hands." Woman was to him the "child twelve times unclean" of whom the poet sings. She was the tempter who had led the first man astray, and who ever continued her work of damnation; a weak, dangerous, mysteriously disquieting creature. And even more bitterly than her body of perdition, he hated her loving heart.

He had often been conscious that women had fixed their affections upon him; but, although he knew that he was impervious to attack, he was enraged by that craving for love with which they were always aquiver.

In his opinion God created woman only to tempt man and to put him to the test. One should not approach her without defensive precautions, and the same fear that one has of traps. In truth, she closely resembled a trap, with her lips open and her arms outstretched towards man.

He had no indulgence save for nuns, whom their vows rendered harmless; but he treated them harshly none the less, because he felt

that, even in the depths of their fettered and humbled hearts, there still lived that everlasting affection, which went out to him, priest though he was.

He felt it in their glances, which were more melting with pious fervour than those of the monks; in those ecstatic transports in which their sex was wont to indulge; in their outbursts of love towards the Christ, which angered him because it was woman's love, carnal love; he was conscious of that accursed tenderness in their very docility, in the softness of their voices when they spoke to him, in their downcast eyes, and in their submissive tears when he reproved them roughly.

And he would shake his cassock when he went out of the door of the convent, and would stride swiftly away as if he were flying from some danger.

He had a niece who lived with her mother in a small house near by. He strove earnestly to make her a sister of charity.

She was a pretty creature, giddy and ban-

tering. When the abbé preached at her, she laughed; and when he lost his temper with her, she would embrace him passionately, pressing him to her heart, while he instinctively tried to extricate himself from that embrace, which nevertheless caused him a delicious thrill of pleasure, arousing in the depths of his being that instinct of fatherhood which slumbers in every man.

He often spoke to her of God, of his God, as he walked by her side along the country roads. She hardly listened to him, but gazed at the sky, the grass, and the flowers, with a joy in living that could be read in her eyes. Sometimes she would dart away to catch some flying thing, and would exclaim as she brought it back: "See how pretty it is, uncle; I would like to kiss it." And that longing to kiss insects or lilac flowers disturbed, irritated, and disgusted the priest, who recognised therein that ineradicable tenderness which is always budding in a woman's heart.

And behold one day the sacristan's wife, who

did Abbé Marignan's housework, informed him cautiously that his niece had a lover.

He was terribly shocked, and stood gasping for breath, with his face covered with lather, for he was shaving.

When he was once more in condition to think and to speak, he cried:

"That is not true; you are lying, Mélanie!"

But the peasant woman placed her hand over her heart:

"May our Lord judge me if I am lying, monsieur le curé. I tell you that she goes out every night as soon as your sister 's gone to bed. They meet down by the river. All you need to do is just go there, and see for yourself, between ten o'clock and midnight."

He ceased to scrape his chin, and began to pace the floor excitedly, as he always did when he was engaged in serious meditation. When he concluded to return to his shaving, he cut himself three times, from nose to ear.

Moonlight

All day long he said not a word, bursting with indignation and wrath. His priestly rage, in face of love unconquerable, was intensified by the moral exasperation of a father, a guardian, entrusted with the keeping of a soul, who has been deceived, robbed, tricked by a mere child; the selfish, suffocating wrath of parents to whom their daughter declares that she has chosen a husband, without their help and in spite of them.

After dinner he tried to read a little, but he could not do it; and he became more and more indignant. When the clock struck ten he seized his cane, a formidable oaken staff which he always used in his walks at night when he went out to visit some sick person. And he glanced with a smile at the huge cudgel as he twirled it threateningly in his muscular countryman's fist. Then, of a sudden, he sprang to his feet, and, grinding his teeth, brought it down upon a chair, the back of which fell shattered to the floor.

He opened his door to go out; but paused

in the doorway, surprised by such a splendour of moonlight as one seldom sees.

And as he was blessed with an exalted imagination, of the sort that the Fathers of the Church, those poetic dreamers, must have had, he suddenly became distraught, profoundly moved by the grand yet tranquil beauty of the pallid night.

In his little garden, bathed with soft light, his fruit-trees, set in rows, cast the shadow of their slender limbs, scarce clothed with verdure, on the gravelled paths; while the giant honeysuckle clinging to the wall of his house exhaled a fragrant, as it were a sweetened breath, so that a sort of perfumed soul seemed to hover about in the warm, clear evening.

He began to breathe deep, drinking the air as drunkards drink their wine, and he walked slowly, enchanted, wonder-struck, his niece almost forgotten.

When he had gained the open country, he stopped to gaze upon the broad expanse, all

inundated by that caressing radiance, drowned in the soft and languorous charm of a cloudless night. The frogs at every instant threw into space their short, metallic notes, and the distant nightingales added their rippling music, which induces dreams without thought—that airy, vibrating melody, made to serve as an accompaniment to kisses, to moonlight seduction.

The abbé walked on, with a sinking at his heart which he could not understand. He felt as it were enfeebled, suddenly exhausted; he longed to sit down, and to remain there, in contemplation, marvelling at God in all His work.

Farther on, following the curving of the little stream, wound a row of white poplars. A fine haze, a white vapour through which the moon's rays shone, turning it to glistening silver, hung about and above the banks, enveloping the whole winding course of the stream with a sort of light, transparent down.

Again the priest halted, stirred to the depths

of his soul by an increasing, irresistible emotion. And a doubt, a vague disquietude stole over him; he felt the birth within him of one of those problems which he sometimes propounded to himself.

Why had God done this? As the night was intended for sleep, for oblivion, for rest, why make it lovelier than the day, softer than the dawn and the sunsets; and why did that stately, seductive star, more poetic than the sun, and to all seeming (so discreet it is) destined to shine upon things too delicate, too mysterious for the broad light of day — why was it come to brighten all the shades?

Why did not the most talented of singing birds rest like the others, instead of performing in the disquieting darkness?

Why was this half-veil cast over the world? Why this fluttering of the heart, this emotion of the soul, this languor of the flesh?

Why this display of charms which men never see, because they are in their beds? For whom was this sublime spectacle in-

tended, that profusion of poetic beauty cast from heaven upon earth?

The abbé did not understand.

But behold, at the end of the field, beneath the arched trees wet with glistening mist, two shadows appeared, walking side by side.

The man was the taller and had his arm about his sweetheart's neck; and from time to time he kissed her on the forehead. They animated suddenly the lifeless landscape, which enveloped them like a divine frame fashioned for them. They seemed a single being, the being from whom that tranquil and silent night was made; and they walked towards the priest, like a living answer, his Master's answer, to his question.

He stood there, overwhelmed, his heart beating fast; and he fancied that he had before him some biblical scene, like the loves of Ruth and Boaz—the accomplishment of the Lord's will in one of those magnificent settings spoken of in Holy Writ. The verses of the Song of Songs began to hum in his

ears — the ardent cries, the cravings of the body, all the glowing poetry of that poem aflame with love.

And he said to himself: "Perhaps God has made such nights, in order to throw a veil of idealism over the loves of men."

He withdrew before this couple who went ever arm in arm. It was his niece, to be sure; but he asked himself if he had not been on the point of disobeying God. And must it not be that love is lawful in God's sight, since He visibly encompasses it with such spendour?

And he fled, bewildered, almost ashamed, as if he had penetrated into a temple where he had not the right to go.

1884.

The Necklace

The Necklace

SHE was one of those pretty, charming girls who, as if by a mistake of destiny, are born into a family of government clerks. She had no dowry, no expectations, no means of being known, appreciated, loved, and married, by any man of wealth and distinction; and she submitted to be married to an underclerk at the Department of Public Instruction.

She dressed simply, being unable to adorn herself, but she was as unhappy as a woman who has married below her station; for women have neither caste nor race, their beauty, their grace, and their charms taking the place with them of noble birth and family. Their innate refinement, their instinctive breeding, their mental adaptability are their only hierarchy, and make a girl of the common people the equal of the greatest of *grandes dames.*

She suffered constantly, feeling that she was born to enjoy all the refinements and luxuries of life. She suffered because of the poverty of her home, the bareness of the walls, the dilapidated state of the chairs, the hideousness of the materials. All these things, which another woman of her caste would not even have noticed, tortured and angered her. The sight of the little Breton maid who took care of her humble establishment aroused in her mind despairing regrets and wild dreams. She dreamed of silent antechambers, hung with Oriental fabrics, lighted by tall bronze candelabra, and with two tall valets in knee-breeches dozing in spacious arm-chairs, made drowsy by the heavy heat from the stove. She dreamed of long salons furnished in old silk, with slender furniture bearing priceless trifles; and of dainty little perfumed boudoirs, made for five o'clock chats with one's closest friends, with well-known and much sought after men whose attentions all women envy and desire.

When she sat down to dine at the round table covered with a cloth that had been used three days, opposite her husband, who, as he removed the lid of the soup-tureen, exclaimed with an enchanted air: "Ah! a good old stew! I know of nothing better than that!" she dreamed of dainty dinners, of gleaming silverware, of tapestries peopling the walls with antique personages and strange birds in the midst of an enchanted forest; she dreamed of exquisite dishes served on splendid plate, of gallantries whispered and listened to with a sphinxlike smile, while you are eating the pink flesh of a trout or the wing of a chicken.

She had no fine dresses, no jewels, nothing. And she cared for nothing else; she felt that she was made for those things. She would so have liked to be attractive, to be fascinating, to be envied and sought after.

She had a wealthy friend, a former schoolmate at the convent, whom she would not go to see, she suffered so on returning home.

And she wept whole days with disappointment, regret, distress, and despair.

One evening her husband came home with the air of a conqueror, holding a big envelope in his hand.

"Here is something for you," he said.

She hastily tore the envelope, and took out a printed card on which were these words:

"The Minister of Public Instruction and Mme. Georges Ramponneau invite M. and Mme. Loisel to pass the evening at the Ministerial palace on Monday, January 18th."

Instead of being overjoyed, as her husband hoped, she tossed the invitation angrily on the table, murmuring:

"What do you expect me to do with that?"

"Why, my dear, I thought that you would be pleased. You never go out, and here is an opportunity—a fine one! I had the greatest difficulty in obtaining it. Everybody tries to get them; they are very much sought after,

and not many are given to clerks. You will see the whole official world there."

She looked at him with an irritated eye, and demanded impatiently:

"What do you expect me to put on my back to go there?"

He had not thought of that.

"Why," he faltered, "the dress you wear to the theatre. It looks very nice to me ——"

He paused, stupefied, beside himself, to see that his wife was weeping. Two great tears were rolling slowly down from the corners of her eyes to the corners of her mouth.

"What 's the matter? what 's the matter?" he stammered.

But by a violent effort she had conquered her weakness, and she answered calmly, wiping her wet cheeks:

"Nothing, only I have no dress and so I can't go to this ball. Give your card to some colleague whose wife is better equipped than I."

He was in despair.

"Let us see, Mathilde," he replied. "How much will it cost, a suitable dress that you can wear again on other occasions; something very simple?"

She reflected a few seconds, making her calculations and also thinking how large a sum she could ask for without bringing forth an instant refusal and a horrified exclamation from the economical clerk.

At last she replied, hesitatingly:

"I don't know exactly, but it seems to me that I could make out with four hundred francs."

He turned a little pale, for he had set aside just that sum to purchase a rifle and indulge in an occasional hunting-excursion, during the summer, on the plain of Nanterre, with some friends who went there on Sundays to shoot larks.

But he said:

"Very good. I will give you four hundred francs. And try to have a pretty dress."

The day of the ball drew near, and Madame Loisel seemed sad, disturbed, anxious. Her dress was ready, however. Her husband said to her one evening:

"What 's the matter? Tell me; you have been very queer for three days."

And she replied:

"It annoys me to have not a jewel, not a single stone, nothing to put on. I shall look as poverty-stricken as can be. I should almost prefer not to go to the ball."

"You might wear natural flowers," he rejoined. "They are very stylish at this season. You can get two or three magnificent roses for ten francs."

She was not convinced.

"No, there is nothing more humiliating than to look poor among a lot of rich women."

"How stupid you are!" cried her husband. "Go to your friend Madame Forestier and ask her to lend you some jewels. You are intimate enough with her to do that."

She uttered a cry of joy.

"That's so. I had n't thought of that."

The next day she went to her friend's house, and told her of her trouble.

Madame Forestier went to a wardrobe with a glass door, took out a large jewel-box, brought it to Madame Loisel, opened it, and said to her:

"Take your choice, my dear."

She saw first of all bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian cross in gold and precious stones, a beautiful piece of work. She tried them on before a mirror, hesitated, could not decide to part with them, to replace them. She kept asking:

"You have nothing else?"

"Why, yes. Look. I don't know what may take your fancy."

Suddenly she discovered in a black satin case a superb diamond necklace, and her heart began to beat with an immoderate longing. Her hands trembled as she took it up. She fastened it about her throat, over her high dress, and stood in ecstasy before her own image.

Then she asked, hesitatingly, in an agony of suspense:

"Can you lend me this, just this and nothing else?"

"Why, yes, to be sure."

She sprang upon the neck of her friend, kissed her passionately, then fled with her treasure.

The day of the ball arrived. Madame Loisel had a triumph. She was prettier than any of the others, stylish, gracious, smiling, and mad with joy. All the men stared at her, asked her name, requested to be presented. All the clerks in the Department wanted to waltz with her. The minister noticed her.

She danced madly, in a frenzy, intoxicated by pleasure, regardless of everything in the triumph of her beauty, in the pride of her success, in a sort of cloud of happiness composed of all that homage, of all that admiration, of all those newly kindled desires, of that complete victory which is so sweet to a woman's heart.

She went away about four in the morning.

Her husband had been asleep since midnight in a little, deserted anteroom, with three other gentlemen whose wives were enjoying themselves hugely.

He threw over her shoulders the wraps he had brought for her to wear home — modest garments of every-day life, whose shabbiness contrasted with the elegance of the ball-dress. She felt this and insisted on hastening away, to avoid being noticed by the other women, who were wrapping themselves in rich furs.

Loisel detained her.

"Wait a moment; you 'll take cold outside. I will go and call a cab."

She would not listen to him, however, but hurried down the stairs. When they were in the street, they could find no cab; and they set out to look for one, shouting after the drivers whom they saw passing in the distance.

They walked towards the Seine, in dire discomfort, shivering with cold. At last they found on the quay one of those ancient nocturnal coupés which are seen in Paris only

after nightfall, as if they were ashamed to show their shabbiness during the day.

It took them to their door on Rue des Martyrs, and they went sadly up to their apartment. It was all over, for her. And he was thinking that he must be at the office at ten o'clock.

She removed the wraps with which her shoulders were covered, standing in front of the mirror, in order to see herself once more in all her glory. But suddenly she gave a shriek. Her diamond necklace was no longer about her neck!

Her husband, already half undressed, asked:

"What's the matter with you?"

She turned to him, half distracted:

"I have—I have—I no longer have Madame Forestier's necklace."

He sprang to his feet in dismay.

"What? What do you say? It's impossible!"

And they hunted in the folds of the dress,

in the folds of her cloak, in all the pockets, everywhere. They could not find it.

"Are you sure that you had it when you left the ball?" he asked.

"Yes, I felt it in the vestibule of the palace."

"But, if you had lost it in the street, we should have heard it drop. It must be in the cab."

"Yes, that is probable. Did you take the number?"

"No. Did n't you look at it?"

"No."

They stared at each other in utter dismay. At last Loisel dressed himself.

"I am going to walk back over the whole distance we walked to the cab," he said, "to see if I can't find it."

And he left the room. She sat there in her ball-dress, without strength to go to bed, cowering in a chair, without fire, without a thought.

Her husband returned about seven o'clock. He had found nothing.

He went to the Prefecture of Police, to the newspaper offices, to offer a reward; to the cab companies—everywhere, in short, that a ray of hope suggested.

She waited all day, in the same state of benumbed dismay in face of this terrible disaster.

Loisel returned at night, pale and hollow-cheeked; he had discovered nothing.

"You must write to your friend," he said, "that you have broken the fastening of her necklace, and that you are having it repaired. That will give us time to turn round."

She wrote at his dictation.

At the end of a week they had lost all hope; and Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

"We must think about replacing the jewels."

The next day they took the box that had held it and went to the jeweller whose name was inside. He consulted his books.

"It was not I who sold the necklace, madame," he said; "I simply furnished the case."

Then they went from one jeweller to another, looking for a necklace like the lost one, searching their memories, both fairly ill with disappointment and mental anguish.

In a shop at the Palais Royal they found a string of diamonds which seemed to them to be absolutely like the one they had lost. It was worth forty thousand francs, but they could have it for thirty-six thousand.

They requested the jeweller not to sell it for three days. And they bargained with him—that he should take it back for thirty-four thousand francs if the other should be found before the end of February.

Loisel had eighteen thousand francs left him by his father. He would borrow the rest.

And he borrowed, asking one person for a thousand francs, another for five hundred; five louis here, three louis there. He gave

notes, made ruinous agreements, dealt with usurers, with the whole race of money-lenders. He mortgaged the whole latter portion of his life, risked his signature without any certainty that he would be able to honour it; and, dismayed by agonising thoughts of the future, by the black poverty that was about to fall upon him, by the prospect of all sorts of physical privations and mental torture, he went to buy the new diamond necklace, and laid upon the jeweller's counter thirty-six thousand francs.

When Madame Loisel carried the necklace to Madame Forestier, the latter said to her with an injured air :

"You should have returned it sooner, for I might have needed it."

She did not open the case, as her friend dreaded. If she had discovered the substitution, what would she have thought, what would she have said? Would she not have taken her for a thief?

Madame Loisel came to know the wretched

life of the needy. She made the best of it, however, at the outset, heroically. That dreadful debt must be paid. She would pay it. They dismissed their servant; they changed their lodgings, and hired an attic chamber under the eaves.

She became acquainted with the heavier kinds of housework, the odious tasks of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, wearing her pink nails away on the greasy earthenware and the bottoms of the saucepans. She washed the soiled linen, the shirts and dishcloths, and hung them out to dry on a line; she carried the slops down to the street every morning, and carried up the water, stopping on every floor to take breath. And, dressed like a woman of the common people, she went to the fruiterer's, to the grocer's, to the butcher's, with her basket on her arm, bargaining, insulted, doling out her paltry money sou by sou.

Each month they had to meet some notes, renew others, beg for time.

The husband worked evenings straightening out a tradesman's accounts; and he often copied manuscript at night at five sous the page.

And this life lasted ten years.

At the end of that time they had paid everything, everything, the charges of usurers and the accumulation of the compound interest.

Madame Loisel seemed an old woman now. She had become the strong, tough, rugged woman of impoverished households. Always unkempt, with red hands, and skirts askew, she talked loudly while washing the floors with a great splashing. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she would seat herself at the window and think of that evening of long ago, of that ball, at which she had been so lovely and so fêted.

What would have happened if she had not lost that necklace? Who knows? Who knows? What a strange, changeful thing

life is! How little is needed to ruin or to save us!

One Sunday, when she had gone out for a walk in the Champs-Élysées, for a little recreation after the labours of the week, she suddenly observed a woman wheeling a child. It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still fascinating.

Madame Loisel was greatly excited. Should she speak to her? Yes, to be sure. And now that she had paid, she would tell her the whole story. Why not?

She approached her.

"Good day, Jeanne."

The other did not recognise her, and was surprised to be addressed thus familiarly by that *bourgeoise.*

"But — madame," she said hesitatingly, "I don't know — You must have made a mistake."

"No, I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend uttered an exclamation:

"O my poor Mathilde, how you have changed!"

"Yes, I have had some very hard days since I saw you, and much suffering — and all on your account!"

"On my account? How so?"

"You remember that diamond necklace that you lent me to wear to the ball at the ministry?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"How is that, since you brought it back to me?"

"I brought you another just like it. And for ten years now we have been paying for it. You can understand that it was n't easy for us, having nothing. However, it is done, and I am mightily pleased."

Madame Forestier stopped.

"You say that you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?"

"Yes. You did n't notice it! Did you? They were very much alike."

And she smiled with a proud and naïve delight.

Madame Forestier, deeply moved, grasped both her hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! Why, my necklace was paste. It was worth at most five hundred francs!"

1885.

Tallow-Ball

Tallow-Ball

FOR several days in succession, fragments of a routed army had passed through the city. These were not regular bodies of troops, but disbanded mobs. The men had long and filthy beards, their uniforms were in rags, and they marched indolently, without flags and without order. They all seemed prostrated, exhausted, incapable of thought or resolution, marching solely as a matter of habit, and falling to the ground with fatigue as soon as they halted. There was an especially large number of the *garde mobile,* peaceful folk, placid annuitants, bent beneath the weight of their muskets; and active little militiamen, easily frightened and quickly roused to enthusiasm; as ready to attack as to retreat; and among them, a few pairs of red breeches, the remnant of a division decimated in a great battle; dark-uniformed artillerymen in

line with these different varieties of infantrymen; and now and then the gleaming helmet of a heavy-footed dragoon, who found it difficult to keep pace with the lighter step of the troops of the line.

Bodies of riflemen with heroic titles — *Avengers of Defeat, Citizens of the Tomb, Sharers of Death* — passed in their turn, with the air of brigands.

Their leaders, former linen-drapers or grain-dealers, tallow-chandlers or soap-boilers, accidental warriors, who owed their commissions to their money or to the length of their mustaches, bristling with weapons, flannel, and lace, talked in sonorous voices, discussed plans of campaign, and seemed to support dying France, unaided, upon their braggadocio's shoulders. But they were sometimes afraid of their own soldiers, profligate wretches often brave beyond words, pillagers and libertines.

The Prussians were about to enter Rouen, it was said.

Tallow-Ball

The National Guard, which had been reconnoitering with great prudence for two months past in the neighbouring forests, sometimes shooting its own sentinels, and preparing for battle when a young rabbit moved in the underbrush, had returned to its homes. Its arms, its uniforms, all its death-dealing paraphernalia, with which it had been wont to frighten all the milestones within a circuit of three leagues, had suddenly disappeared.

Finally, the last French troops had crossed the Seine, on their way to Pont-Audemer by St.-Sever and Bourg-Achard; and behind them all, the general, desperate, himself overwhelmed in the terrible downfall of a people accustomed to conquer and disastrously beaten despite its legendary courage, marched on foot between two orderlies.

Then profound peace, terrified and silent suspense, settled down upon the city. Many corpulent citizens, enervated by trade, anxiously awaited the conquerors, trembling lest

their roasting spits or their long kitchen-knives should be looked upon as weapons.

Life seemed to have stopped short; the shops were closed, the street dumb. Sometimes an inhabitant flitted rapidly along the walls, awed by the silence.

The agony of suspense made them long for the enemy's coming.

In the afternoon of the day following the departure of the French troops, a number of uhlans, coming from no one knew where, rode swiftly through the city. Then, a little later, a black mass marched down from the hill of Ste.-Catherine, while two other invading streams appeared on the Darnetal and Boisguillaume roads. The vanguards of the three corps arrived on Place de l'Hôtel de Ville at the same moment; and the German army poured in through all the streets near by, unfolding its battalions, which made the pavements ring beneath their heavy, rhythmic tread.

Orders shouted in a strange, guttural tone

climbed the walls of the houses, which seemed dead and deserted; while, behind the closed shutters, many eyes watched those victorious men, masters of the city, and of the fortunes and lives of the people, by the "right of war." The inhabitants, in their dark rooms, shivered with the same frantic terror that is caused by cataclysms, by the great and deadly upheavals of the earth's surface, against which all wisdom and all strength are of no avail. For the same sensation recurs whenever the established order of things is overturned; when security has ceased to exist, when everything that has been protected by the laws of man or of Nature finds itself at the mercy of an ignorant and pitiless brutality. The earthquake that destroys a whole people beneath their crumbling houses; the swollen river that bears drowned peasants, with bodies of cattle and beams wrenched from the roofs of buildings; or the glorious army, slaughtering those who defend themselves, taking the rest prisoners, plundering in the

name of the Sword, and thanking God to the roar of cannon; all these are so many horrible scourges which discourage all belief in eternal justice, all the confidence which we are taught to have in the protection of Heaven and in the common sense of man.

Small detachments knocked at each door, then disappeared in the houses. That was the occupation after the invasion. That part of the duty of the vanquished had begun which consisted in being affable to the conquerors.

After some time, the first alarm having faded away, tranquillity reigned once more. In many families, the Prussian officer ate at the table. He was sometimes well-bred, and, as a matter of courtesy, deplored the fate of France and expressed his repugnance at having to take part in the war. They were grateful to him for that sentiment; and then, one day or another, they might stand in need of his protection. By treating him well, they might perhaps obtain the favour of having fewer

men to feed. And why should they offend a person upon whom their fate absolutely depended? To do so would be foolhardiness rather than courage. And foolhardiness is no longer a failing of the citizens of Rouen, as in the days of the heroic defences which have made their city famous. In short, they said to themselves — a conclusive argument derived from French urbanity — that it was perfectly legitimate for them to be courteous to the foreign soldier in their own homes, provided that they manifested no familiarity with him in public. Out of doors they did not know one another; but in the house they talked freely, and the German stayed longer and longer each evening, warming himself at the family fire.

Little by little the city itself resumed its ordinary aspect. The French seldom left their houses, but Prussian soldiers swarmed in the streets. However, the officers of the Blue Hussars, who dragged their implements of death arrogantly over the pavements, seemed

not to have very much more contempt for the humble citizens than the dragoon officers who drank at the same cafés the year before.

But there was something in the air, something subtle and unfamiliar, an intolerable foreign atmosphere, like a permeating odour, the odour of invasion. It filled the houses and the public squares, changed the taste of food, gave one the impression of travelling among distant, savage, and dangerous tribes.

The conquerors demanded money, much money. The people always paid; indeed, they were rich. But the more wealthy a Norman tradesman becomes, the more keenly he suffers with every sacrifice, with the passing of every morsel of his wealth into the hands of others.

Meanwhile, within two or three leagues of the city, along the river — by Croisset, Dieppedalle, or Biessart — the boatmen and fishermen often fished up from the bottom the dead body of a German, horribly bloated in his uniform, killed with a blow of a knife or a cudgel.

his head crushed with a stone, or pushed into the water from a bridge. The river mud buried those obscure and ferocious but legitimate acts of vengeance — unknown heroism, secret attacks, more hazardous than battles in broad daylight, and without any of the glamour of fame. For hatred of the foreigner always arms some intrepid souls that are ready to die for an idea.

In due time, as the invaders, although they subjected the city to their inflexible discipline, were guilty of none of the horrors which they were reputed to have committed along the whole course of their triumphal march, the people grew bolder, and the craving for trade stirred anew the hearts of the tradesmen of the province. Some had important engagements at Havre, which was still occupied by the French army; and they determined to try to reach that port, going by land to Dieppe, and taking boat there.

They made use of the influence of the German officers whose acquaintance they had

made, and a permit to leave the city was obtained from the commanding general.

And so, a large four-horse diligence having been secured for the journey, and ten persons having entered their names with the proprietor, they decided to start one Tuesday morning, before daylight, in order to avoid attracting a crowd.

The ground had been frozen for some time; and on the Monday about three o'clock, great black clouds came down from the north, bringing the snow, which fell constantly throughout the evening and night.

At half past four in the morning, the travellers assembled in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Normandie, where they were to take the diligence.

They were still half asleep, and shivered with cold under their wraps. They could not see one another plainly in the darkness, and the multitude of heavy winter garments made them all resemble corpulent curés in their long cassocks. But two men recognised each

other; a third accosted them, and they talked. —"I have brought my wife," said one.—"So have I."—"And I."—The first speaker added: "We shall not return to Rouen, and if the Prussians threaten Havre, we shall go to England."—All had the same plans, being of the same temperament.

But the horses were not harnessed. A small lantern, in the hands of a hostler, issued from one dark door now and again, and vanished immediately through another. Horses' feet, deadened by the bedding, stamped the ground; and a man's voice could be heard inside, speaking to the animals and swearing. A faint tinkle of bells indicated that the harnesses were being handled; the faint tinkle soon became a loud and incessant jangling, caused by the movement of the horses, sometimes stopping an instant, then beginning again, with a sharp clang, accompanied by the dull sound of an iron-shod hoof beating the ground.

Suddenly the door was closed. All sounds

ceased. The frozen citizens had stopped talking; they stood there stiff and motionless.

A glistening curtain of white flakes fell unceasingly to the ground; it effaced forms, cloaking everything with an icy moss; and in the deathlike silence of the calm and shrouded city, naught could be heard save the ill-defined, indescribable rustle of the falling snow — a sensation rather than a sound — the intermingling of light atoms which seem to fill all space and to cover the world.

The man reappeared with his lantern, dragging at the end of a rope a melancholy horse, which did not come willingly. He placed him beside the pole, fastened the traces, and walked about him many times to make sure that the harness was all right; for he could use only one hand, having the lantern in the other. As he went in to get the second beast, he noticed all the statuelike travellers, white with snow, and said to them:

"Why don't you get into the carriage? You'll be under cover, at least."

They had not thought of it, evidently, and they rushed for the door. The three men seated their wives at the end farthest from the door, then got in themselves; the other ill-defined, veiled figures followed and took the remaining places, without exchanging a word.

The floor was covered with straw in which the feet sank. The ladies farthest from the door, having brought little copper foot-warmers, with chemically prepared fuel, lighted them, and for some time enumerated to one another, in low tones, the merits of that invention, repeating things that they had known a long while.

At last, six horses instead of four having been attached to the diligence because of the difficult travelling, a voice outside inquired: "Is every one in?" A voice within answered: "Yes." And they started.

The vehicle moved slowly, slowly, at a foot-pace. The wheels sank in the snow; the whole body groaned and creaked dully; the horses slipped, snorted, and smoked; and

the driver's enormous whip cracked incessantly, flew about in all directions, curling and uncurling like a slender serpent, and suddenly falling upon some rounded rump, which instantly put forth a more violent effort.

But the daylight imperceptibly grew stronger. The light flakes, which one traveller, a pure-blooded Rouenese, compared to a fall of cotton, had ceased to descend. A grimy light forced its way through great black clouds, which intensified the whiteness of the fields, where there appeared now a line of tall, snow-clad trees, and now a cottage with a hood of snow.

In the diligence, the passengers eyed each other curiously in the gloomy light of that dawn.

At the back, in the best seats, opposite each other, dozed Monsieur and Madame Loiseau, wholesale dealers in wine, of Rue Grand-Pont. Formerly clerk to a tradesman who had been ruined in business, Loiseau had bought the establishment and made a fortune. He sold

very bad wine at a very low figure to small country dealers, and was esteemed by his friends and acquaintances a cunning rascal, a genuine Norman, full of wiles and merriment.

His reputation as a sharper was so well established that one night at the prefecture, Monsieur Tournel, author of divers fables and ballads, a shrewd and biting wit and a local celebrity, having proposed to the ladies, who seemed to be a little sleepy, a game of *Loiseau vole*,[1] the joke itself flew [*vola*] through the prefect's salons, and, passing thence into the salons of the city, kept all the jaws of the province laughing for a month.

Loiseau was famous, moreover, for his practical jokes of all sorts, his jests, good or bad. And no one could speak of him without adding at once: "He's a most extraordinary fellow, that Loiseau!"

[1] The title of the game is *l'oiseau vole,* the bird flies. The joke is made possible by the fact that the same word, *voler,* means to fly and to steal; hence *Loiseau vole,* Loiseau steals.—[Trans.]

Rather short of stature, he possessed a balloonlike paunch, surmounted by a ruddy face between grizzled whiskers.

His wife, a tall, strongly-built, determined woman, supplied the order and the arithmetic of the establishment, which he enlivened by his jovial activity.

Beside them, more dignified of mien, as belonging to a superior caste, sat M. Carré-Lamadon, a man of note, prominent in the cotton trade, owner of three mills, officer of the Legion of Honour, and member of the General Council. Throughout the Empire he had remained a leader of the well-disposed opposition, solely in order to obtain a better price for his adhesion to the cause which he combated with courteous weapons, to use his own expression. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who was much younger than her husband, was the constant consolation of the officers of good family in garrison at Rouen.

She sat opposite her husband—a small, dainty, pretty creature, muffled in her furs —

and gazed with a distressful eye at the unpromising interior of the vehicle.

Her neighbours, Count and Countess Hubert de Bréville, bore one of the oldest and noblest names in all Normandy. The count, an old gentleman of the grandest manners, strove to emphasise, by the artifices of his dressing-table, his natural resemblance to King Henri IV., who, according to a legend most creditable to the family, had got a Dame de Bréville with child; in consideration whereof her husband had become a count, and governor of a province.

Count Hubert, a colleague of Monsieur Carré-Lamadon in the General Council, represented the Orleanist faction in the department. The story of his marriage with the daughter of a small ship-owner at Nantes had always been a mystery. But as the countess had the *grand air*, received with the utmost dignity, and was even supposed to have been loved by one of Louis-Philippe's sons, the nobility made much of her, and her salon continued

to be the first in the province, and the only one where the old style of gallantry was still retained, and to which it was difficult to gain admission.

The fortune of the Brévilles, all in real estate, produced, so it was said, five hundred thousand francs a year.

These six people occupied the best seats in the diligence; the prosperous, serene, strong-minded side of society—virtuous folk of the ruling class, who had Religion and Principles.

By a curious chance, all the women were on the same side, and the countess had other neighbours in the persons of two sisters of charity, who told long strings of beads and muttered *Paters* and *Aves*. One was old, with a face riddled by the smallpox, as if she had received a volley of grape-shot at close quarters. The other, who was very thin, had a pretty but sickly face, above the chest of a consumptive, consumed by the devouring faith that makes martyrs and fanatics.

Opposite the two nuns were a man and a woman who attracted all eyes.

The man was well-known — Cornudet the democrat, the terror of respectable people. For twenty years past he had dipped his bushy red beard in the beer glasses of all the democratic cafés. He had squandered with brethren and friends a handsome fortune, which came to him from his father, an ex-confectioner, and he was impatiently awaiting the Republic, in order to obtain at last the office earned by the consumption of so much Revolutionary beer. On the fourth of September, as the result of a practical joke perhaps, he had thought that he was appointed prefect; but when he attempted to enter upon the duties, the clerks, who were in sole charge of the office, refused to recognise him, and he was compelled to withdraw. Being a very good fellow, however, inoffensive and obliging, he had worked with incomparable zeal in organising the defence of the city. He had caused holes to be dug

in the fields, all the young trees in the neighbouring forests to be felled, and traps to be set on all the roads; and, at the approach of the enemy, content with his preparations, he had hastily fallen back on the city. He thought now that he could make himself more useful at Havre, where new entrenchments would be required.

The woman, one of the so-called *galant* class, was famous for her premature corpulence, which had earned for her the sobriquet of Tallow-Ball. Short, completely round, fat as a pig, with swollen fingers, drawn in at the joints, like a string of sausages; with a shiny, distended skin, an enormous bust, which puffed out her dress, she was still appetising and popular none the less, her fresh colouring was so pleasant to the eye. Her face was a red apple, a peony-bud just ready to burst; and therein opened two magnificent black eyes, shaded by long, thick lashes, which cast a shadow into their depths; below, a lovely narrow mouth, tempting for the

kiss, furnished with glistening, microscopic teeth.

She was also, it was said, overflowing with invaluable qualities.

As soon as she was recognised, the respectable women whispered together, and the words "hussy," and "public disgrace" were uttered, so loud that she raised her head and cast upon her neighbours a glance so bold and defiant that absolute silence instantly ensued, and everybody looked down except Loiseau, who eyed her with an amused expression.

But the conversation was soon renewed by the three ladies, whom that girl's presence had transformed into friends, almost intimate friends. It seemed to them that they must make a sort of fagot of their wifely dignities, in face of that shameless vender of her charms; for lawful love always assumes a lofty tone with its untrammelled brother.

The three men, too, drawn together by the instinct of conservatives at sight of Cornudet, talked finance with a certain tone of contempt

for the poor. Count Hubert told of the losses which the Prussians had imposed upon him, losses resulting from the stealing of cattle and destruction of crops, with the assurance of a great nobleman ten times a millionaire, whom those depredations would embarrass for little more than a year. M. Carré-Lamadon, who had had a vast experience in the cotton industry, had taken the precaution to send six hundred thousand francs to England, a little hoard against a rainy day, which he provided for every emergency. As for Loiseau, he had arranged to sell to the Intendance Française all the ordinary wines that were left in his cellar, so that the State must owe him a very large sum, which he expected to obtain at Havre.

And all three exchanged swift and friendly glances. Although of different stations in society, they felt that they were brothers in money, in the broad freemasonry of those who possess, who make the gold jingle when they put their hands in their trousers'-pocket.

Tallow-Ball

The diligence moved so slowly that they had not made four leagues at ten o'clock in the morning. The men alighted three times to walk up hills. They began to be disturbed, for they were to breakfast at Tôtes, and they despaired now of reaching there before night. Everybody was watching for a cabaret by the roadside, when the diligence foundered in a snow-drift; and it took two hours to extricate it.

Their appetites increased and disturbed their minds, but no eating-house, no wine-shop appeared; the approach of the Prussians and the passage of the famished French troops having terrified all branches of trade.

The gentlemen visited the farmhouses along the road, in search of provisions, but they could obtain nothing, not even bread; for the suspicious peasant concealed his reserve stock for fear of being plundered by the soldiers, who, having nothing to put in their mouths, took by force whatever they discovered.

About one o'clock in the afternoon, Loiseau declared that he felt decidedly hollow. Everybody had been suffering for as long a time as he had, and the fierce craving for food, constantly increasing, had killed the conversation.

From time to time somebody yawned; in a moment somebody else would follow suit; and each in turn, in accordance with his nature, his breeding, and his social position, opened his mouth noisily, or quietly put his hand in front of the yawning hole, whence a vapour issued.

Several times Tallow-Ball leaned over as if she were trying to find something under her skirts. She hesitated a second, glanced at her neighbours, then tranquilly resumed her position. The faces about her were pale and distorted. Loiseau declared that he would give a thousand francs for a ham. His wife made a gesture as if to protest, then subsided. It always pained her to hear of money being wasted, and she could not even understand jesting on the subject.

"Really, I don't feel well at all," said the count; "how could I have forgotten to bring some provisions!"

They all reproached themselves for similar forgetfulness.

Cornudet had a flask full of rum, however. He offered some to his companions, but they coldly declined. Loiseau alone accepted a swallow, and when he returned the flask, he said:

"That 's good, I tell you; it warms the stomach and fools the appetite."

The alcohol put him in good humour, and he proposed that they should do as the sailors do in the ballad — eat the fattest of the travellers. This indirect allusion to Tallow-Ball offended the well-bred passengers. Nobody answered; Cornudet alone vouchsafed a smile. The two nuns had ceased to mumble their beads, and with their hands buried in their flowing sleeves, they sat like statues, sedately keeping their eyes on the ground, and proffering to Heaven, no doubt, the suffering which it visited upon them.

At last, about three o'clock, finding themselves in the midst of an interminable plain, with no village in sight, Tallow-Ball hastily stooped and took from under the seat a large basket covered with a white napkin.

She took out first of all a small plate and a dainty silver drinking-cup, then a great earthen dish in which were two whole chickens, all carved, surrounded by their jelly; and other good things also could be seen in the basket: pies, fruit, sweets — rations prepared for a three days' journey, so that she might not have to touch the food at inns. The necks of four bottles protruded between the packages of eatables. She took the wing of a chicken, and began daintily to eat it, with one of the small loaves of bread called *régence* in Normandy.

All eyes were fastened upon her. Then the odour of the food was diffused through the vehicle, causing nostrils to expand and moistening their mouths with abundant saliva, which was accompanied by a painful contraction of

the jaw under the ears. The contempt of the ladies for that abandoned creature became ferocious; it was almost a longing to kill her or to throw her out of the diligence into the snow, with her drinking-cup, her basket, and her provisions.

But Loiseau devoured the dish of chicken with his eyes. He said:

"Good! Madame was more prudent than we were. There are people who always think of everything."

She looked up at him.

"Would you like some, monsieur? It is hard to fast from morning till night."

He bowed.

"Frankly, I don't say no, for I can't stand it any longer. In war we must do as the soldiers do, eh, madame! And, with a circular glance about him, he added: "In such times as this a man is very glad to fall in with obliging people."

He had a newspaper, which he spread out to avoid soiling his trousers, and with the

point of a knife that he always carried in his pocket, he lifted a second-joint, all shiny with jelly, tore it apart with his teeth, then chewed it with such evident satisfaction that there arose a profound sigh of distress in the carriage.

But Tallow-Ball, in a soft and humble voice, proposed to the two nuns to share her repast. They both accepted instantly, and, without raising their eyes, began to eat very rapidly, after mumbling their thanks. Nor did Cornudet refuse his neighbour's offer, and, with the two nuns, they improvised a sort of table by spreading newspapers over their knees.

Mouths opened and closed without respite, chewed, swallowed, absorbed food ferociously. Loiseau worked hard in his corner, and in whispers urged his wife to follow his example. She resisted for a long time, but, after a convulsive contraction of the entrails, she yielded. Whereupon her husband grandiloquently asked their "charming fellow traveller," if she would allow him to offer a morsel to Madame Loiseau.

"Why, yes, monsieur, to be sure," she said, with an affable smile, and handed him the dish.

There was some embarrassment when the first bottle of claret was opened: there was but one drinking-cup. They passed it from one to another, after wiping it. Cornudet alone, from gallantry, doubtless, put his lips to the spot that was still moist from his neighbour's lips.

Thereupon, surrounded by people who were eating, suffocated by the odour of the food, the Count and Countess de Bréville, as well as Monsieur and Madame Carré-Lamadon, suffered that execrable torture which has perpetuated the name of Tantalus. Suddenly the manufacturer's young wife heaved a sigh that made all the others turn their heads; she was as white as the snow without; her eyes closed, her head fell forward; she had fainted. Her husband, panic-stricken, appealed to everybody for help. They all seemed to have lost their wits, when the elder of the two

nuns, supporting the invalid's head, held Tallow-Ball's cup to her lips and forced her to swallow a few drops of wine. The charming young woman moved, opened her eyes, smiled, and declared in a dying voice that she felt very well now. But, to prevent a recurrence of the attack, the nun compelled her to drink a brimming glass of claret, and said: "It is hunger, nothing else."

Thereupon, Tallow-Ball, embarrassed and blushing, glanced at the four travellers who were still fasting, and faltered:

"*Mon Dieu!* If I might venture to offer you ladies and gentlemen——"

She stopped, dreading an affront.

Loiseau took up the conversation.

"Parbleu! In such cases as this we must all be brothers, and help one another. Come, mesdames, don't stand on ceremony, but accept. Deuce take it! do we so much as know whether we shall find a house to pass the night in? At the present rate of progress, we shall not be at Tôtes before to-morrow noon."

They hesitated, no one daring to assume the responsibility of saying yes. But the count cut the knot. He turned to the stout, awestruck girl, and said, assuming his loftiest air:

"We accept gratefully, madame."

Only the first step cost. Once the Rubicon was passed, they fell to with a vengeance. The basket was soon empty. It contained, in addition, a *paté de foie gras,* a lark pie, a piece of smoked tongue, Crassane pears, and gingerbread from Pont-Lévêque, cakes, and a cup full of pickled gherkins and onions: like all women, Tallow-Ball adored sour things.

They could not eat the girl's provisions without speaking to her. So they talked, with some reserve at first; then, as she bore herself becomingly, they gradually dropped all restraint. Mesdames de Bréville and Carré-Lamadon, who were accomplished women of the world, were gracious to her with perfect delicacy. The countess, especially, displayed the affable condescension of

a noble dame whom no contact can sully, and she was delightful. But the robust Madame Loiseau, who had the soul of a gendarme, continued morose, saying little and eating a great deal.

Naturally they talked about the war. They told of shocking deeds of the Prussians, of valorous exploits of the French; and all those people, who were running away themselves, did homage to the gallantry of others. Personal anecdotes soon followed; and Tallow-Ball told with genuine emotion, with the fervid language in which such women sometimes display their natural warmth of temperament, how she had left Rouen.

"I thought at first that I could stay," she said. "My house was well supplied with provisions, and I preferred to feed a few soldiers rather than to go into exile Heaven knows where. But when I saw those Prussians, it was too much for me! They made my blood boil with rage; and I wept for shame all day. Oh! if I were a man, I tell

you! I looked at them out of my window, the fat hogs with their pointed helmets, and my maid held my hands to keep me from throwing my furniture down on them. Then some of them came to live in my house, and I jumped at the throat of the first one. They are no harder to strangle than other men! And I 'd have finished that one, if they had n't pulled me off by the hair. After that, I had to keep out of sight. And then, when I saw a chance, I left, and here I am."

They congratulated her warmly. She grew in the esteem of her companions, who had shown no such enthusiam; and Cornudet, as he listened, smiled a smile of apostolic approbation and good-will, as a priest listens to a believer's praise of God; for long-bearded democrats have a monopoly of patriotism, as men in cassocks have of religion. He held forth in his turn, in an authoritative tone, with the emphasis he had acquired from the proclamations that were posted on the walls day after day; and he ended with a burst of

eloquence, in which he lashed that "toad of a Badinguet" [1] in a most magisterial tone.

But Tallow-Ball at once waxed hot, for she was a Bonapartist. She turned redder than a cherry and said, stammering with indignation:

"I would have liked to see you people in his place. That would have been a fine sight —oh, yes! It was you who betrayed that man! There'd be nothing left for us but to leave France, if we were governed by such scamps as you!"

The impassive Cornudet smiled a disdainful and superior smile; but every one felt that harsh words would soon follow, when the count interposed, and not without difficulty appeased the exasperated girl, declaring in a tone of authority that all sincere opinions were worthy of respect. But the countess and the manufacturer's wife, who had in their hearts the unreasoning hatred of fashionable

[1] Badinguet was a Moor in whose garb Louis Napoleon escaped from the fortress of Ham in 1846; hence, a nickname applied to that monarch.—[Trans.]

society for the Republic, and the instinctive liking which all women entertain for beplumed and despotic governments, felt drawn, in spite of themselves, toward that noble-minded prostitute, whose sentiments so closely resembled theirs.

The basket was empty. The ten people had exhausted it without difficulty, regretting that it was no larger. The conversation continued for some time, somewhat less cordial, however, after they had ceased to eat.

Night was falling, the darkness gradually became profound, and the cold, to which we are sensitive during the digestive operation, made Tallow-Ball shiver despite her flesh. Thereupon Madame de Bréville offered her foot-warmer, the fuel in which had been replenished several times since morning; the other accepted it at once, for her feet were as cold as ice. Mesdames Carré-Lamadon and Loiseau lent theirs to the nuns.

The driver had lighted his lanterns. They cast a bright light on the cloud of mist above

the sweating flanks of the pole-horses, and on the snow on both sides of the road, which seemed to unroll before their eyes in the vivid gleam of the lanterns.

Inside the diligence they could see nothing; but suddenly there was a commotion between Tallow-Ball and Cornudet; and Loiseau, whose eyes were searching the darkness, fancied that he saw the long-bearded man hastily draw back, as if he had received a smart blow dealt him without a sound.

Tiny specks of light appeared on the road ahead of them. It was Tôtes. They had been in motion eleven hours, which, with the three hours consumed in four halts, to allow the horses to feed and breathe, made fourteen. They drove into the village and stopped in front of the Hôtel de Commerce.

The porter opened the door. A well-known sound gave all the travellers a shock; it was the clash of scabbards against the floor. In a moment a German voice made some remark.

Although the diligence had come to a standstill, no one alighted; it was as if they expected to be massacred on stepping out. Thereupon the driver appeared, carrying one of his lanterns, which suddenly lighted up those two rows of terrified faces with open mouths, and eyes contracted by surprise and terror.

Beside the driver, in the bright light, stood a German officer, a tall young man, extraordinarily slender and fair, encased in his uniform like a girl in her corsets, and with his flat glazed cap perched on the side of his head, so that he resembled the doorkeeper at an English hotel. His immense mustache, of long, straight hair, growing thinner and thinner on each side, until it ended in a single hair so thin that one could not distinguish the end of it, seemed to weigh down the corners of his mouth, and, pulling upon the cheek, imparted to his lips a drooping fold.

In Alsatian French he invited the travellers to alight, saying stiffly:

"Will you not step out, messieurs and mesdames?"

The two sisters of charity were the first to obey, with the docility of devout creatures accustomed to submission in every form. Then the count and countess appeared, followed by the manufacturer and his wife, and by Loiseau pushing his tall better half before him. He, as he stepped to the ground, said: "Good evening, monsieur," to the officer, from prudence much more than from courtesy. The other, insolent like all people entrusted with great power, stared at him without replying.

Tallow-Ball and Cornudet, although nearest the door, alighted last, assuming a grave and haughty bearing before the enemy. The stout girl tried to control herself and to be calm; the democrat stroked his long reddish beard with a tragic and slightly tremulous hand. They were determined to maintain their dignity, realising that in such encounters every one represents his country in some measure; and, equally revolted by the fawning

of their companions, she strove to appear more proud than her neighbours, the virtuous women; while he, feeling that he must set an example, pursued in his whole attitude his mission of resistance, begun by undermining the roads.

They entered the huge kitchen of the inn, and the German, having demanded the permit signed by the commanding general, in which were detailed the name, description, and business of each traveller, scrutinised them all at great length, comparing their persons with the written descriptions. Then he said abruptly: "It is all right," and disappeared.

After that, they breathed again. Their hunger had returned and supper was ordered. A half-hour was necessary to prepare it, and while two maidservants made a pretence of attending to that duty they went to inspect the bedrooms. They found that they were all quartered on a long corridor, at the end of which was a small glass door.

They were at last about to take their places at the table, when the keeper of the inn appeared. He was a former horse-trader, a stout, asthmatic man, who was always hoarse and wheezy, with the rattle of mucus in his throat. His father had handed down to him the name of Follenvie.

"Mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset?" he said inquiringly.

Tallow-Ball started and turned:

"That is my name."

"Mademoiselle, the Prussian officer wishes to speak with you at once."

"With me?"

"Yes, if you are Mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset."

She seemed disturbed, reflected a second, then declared resolutely:

"That may be, but I won't go."

There was a commotion all about her; all the others discussed that order and tried to divine its cause. The count drew near.

"You are wrong, madame, for your refusal

may give rise to serious difficulties, not only for yourself, but for all your travelling-companions. We should never resist those who are stronger than we. To comply can surely place you in no danger; doubtless it is to attend to some formality he has overlooked."

The whole party supported him; they begged her, they urged her, they scolded her, and they ended by persuading her; for they all dreaded the complications that might result from a hasty act. She said at last:

"It's for you that I do it; don't forget that."

The countess took her hand.

"And we thank you for it."

She left the room. They waited for her to return before seating themselves at the table. They were all distressed because they had not been sent for instead of that impulsive and irascible girl, and they mentally prepared platitudes for use in case they should be summoned in their turn.

But after ten minutes she returned, breathing hard, purple, and suffocating with rage.

"Oh! the cur! the cur!" she stammered.

They were all most anxious to know what had happened, but she said nothing; and as the count insisted, she replied with great dignity:

"No, it doesn't concern you; I cannot speak."

Thereupon they took their seats about a tall soup-tureen, from which emerged an odour of cabbage. Despite that alarm, the supper was a festive occasion. The cider was good, and the Loiseau family and the sisters of charity partook of it for economy's sake. The others ordered wine, except Cornudet, who called for beer. He had a peculiar way of uncorking the bottle, of making the liquid foam, and of gazing at it as he tipped the glass, which he then held between his eye and the lamp to mark well the colour. When he drank, his long beard, which had become tinged with the shade of his favourite beverage, seemed to quiver with affection; he looked cross-eyed, in order not to lose sight

of his glass, and he looked as if he were performing the only function for which he was born. One would have said that he was framing in his own mind a comparison, an affinity, as it were, between the two great passions which absorbed his whole life: Pale Ale and the Revolution; and he certainly could not imbibe one without thinking of the other.

Monsieur and Madame Follenvie dined at the other end of the table. The man, snorting like a burst locomotive, had too much going on in his chest to be able to talk while he ate; but the wife was never silent. She described all her sensations on the arrival of the Prussians—what they did, what they said: abominating them, in the first place, because they were an expense to her; and, in the second place, because she had two sons in the army. She addressed herself more particularly to the countess, being overjoyed to talk with a lady of quality.

Then she lowered her voice in order to talk

of delicate matters, and her husband interrupted her from time to time:

"You would do better to keep quiet, Madame Follenvie."

But she paid no heed to him and continued:

"Yes, madame, those fellows do nothing but eat potatoes and pork, and then pork and potatoes. And you need n't think that they 're neat. No, indeed! They leave filth everywhere, saving the respect I owe you. And if you should see them drilling hours and days at a time—they 're all together in a field yonder—and march forward and march back, and turn this way and turn that way. If they 'd just work on the land at least, or if they worked on the roads in their own country! But no, madame, these soldiers are no good to any one! The poor people have to support them, while they learn nothing but just how to kill! I 'm only an old woman, without any education, it 's true, but when I see them playing themselves out by tramping about from morning till night, I say to myself: 'When there 's

lots of people who make so many discoveries in order to be useful, why should others take so much pains to do harm?' Really, now, isn't it an outrage to kill people, whether they're Prussians, or English, or Poles, or French? If you revenge yourself on some one who's injured you, that's wrong, because you get punished for it; but when they slaughter our boys like wild birds, with muskets, is that all right? for they give decorations to the one that kills the most. No, I tell you, I shall never understand that."

Cornudet raised his voice:

"War is barbarism when you attack a peaceful neighbour; it's a sacred duty when you defend your country."

The old woman looked down.

"Yes, when you defend yourself, that's another thing; but would n't it be better to kill all the kings who go to war for their own pleasure?"

Cornudet's eye flashed.

"Bravo, citizeness!" he said.

M. Carré-Lamadon was reflecting deeply. Although he was a fanatical admirer of great captains, that peasant woman's sensible remarks made him think of the wealth that would be brought into a country if so many unoccupied and consequently ruinous arms, so much force which was maintained in an unproductive employment, should be employed in the great industrial undertakings which it will require centuries to finish.

But Loiseau, leaving his seat, went to the innkeeper and talked with him. The stout man laughed and coughed and spat; his huge paunch shook with delight at his neighbour's jokes, and he bought six cases of claret, to be delivered in the spring, when the Prussians had gone.

The supper was no sooner at an end than they all retired, being completely exhausted.

Loiseau, however, who had been watching things, sent his wife to bed, then he put his ear to the crack of the door, and anon his eye to the keyhole, trying to discover what he called the "mysteries of the corridor."

After about an hour he heard a rustling, hastily looked out, and saw Tallow-Ball, who seemed more corpulent than ever in a loose *peignoir* of blue cashmere, trimmed with white lace. She had a candle in her hand, and she went toward the door with the large lettering, at the end of the corridor. But another door near by was partly opened, and when she returned, a few minutes later, Cornudet, in his suspenders, followed her. They talked in a low tone, then stopped. Tallow-Ball seemed to be emphatically denying admission to her room. Loiseau did not hear the words, unfortunately; but at the end, as they raised their voices, he was able to catch a few words. Cornudet persisted with much earnestness. He said:

"Nonsense, you're foolish! What difference does it make to you?"

She answered in an indignant tone:

"No, my dear man, there are times when one does n't act like that; and it would be shameful here."

He evidently did not understand, and asked her why. At that she flew into a rage, and raised her voice still more.

"Why? Don't you understand why? When there are Prussians in the house, in the next room perhaps?"

He said no more. The patriotic shame of that hussy, who would not allow herself to be caressed in the neighbourhood of the enemy, must have revived the dignity moribund in his heart; for, after kissing her simply, he crept back to his room like a wolf.

After that, silence reigned throughout the house. But soon there arose somewhere, in an uncertain direction — it might have been from the cellar or the loft — a mighty, monotonous, regular snoring, a dull and prolonged roar, accompanied by a trembling as of a boiler under pressure of steam — Monsieur Follenvie was asleep!

As they had decided to start at eight o'clock the next morning, they were all in the kitchen

at that hour; but the diligence, which had a roof of snow, stood alone in the courtyard without horses or driver. They hunted in vain for the latter, in the stables, in the hay-loft, in the carriage-house. Thereupon all the men resolved to beat up the country for him, and they sallied forth. They found themselves on the village square, with the church opposite, and on either side low houses in which they could see Prussian soldiers. The first one that they saw was peeling potatoes. The second was washing the floor of a hair-dresser's shop. Another, bearded to the eyes, was kissing a crying brat, and dandling him on his knee in his efforts to calm him; and the buxom peasant women, whose men were in "the army of war," pointed out by signs to their submissive conquerors the work that they were to do: split wood, tend the soup, grind the coffee; one of them was even washing the linen of his hostess, a helpless old grandmother.

The count in his amazement questioned the

beadle, who was coming out of the rectory. The old church rat answered:

"Oh! those fellows are not bad; they 're not Prussians, so they say; they come from some place farther away, I don't just know where; and they 've all left wives and children at home; they don't enjoy war either, I tell you! I am sure that they are weeping for their men there too, and that it will make a lot of unhappiness for them, as it does for us. They 're not so very wretched here just now, because they are doing no harm and working as if they were at home. You see, monsieur, poor folks must help one another. It 's the great folks who make war."

Cornudet, indignant at the *entente cordiale* between victors and vanquished, returned to the inn, preferring to seclude himself there. Loiseau said jestingly: "They are repeopling the country." Monsieur Carré-Lamadon said solemnly: "They are repairing the injury they have done."

But they did not find the driver. At last

they discovered him in the village café, fraternising with the officer's orderly.

The count questioned him:

"Did n't we order you to have your horses harnessed at eight o'clock?"

"Oh, yes! but I had other orders later."

"What were they?"

"Not to harness at all."

"Who gave you that order?"

"Why, the Prussian officer."

"For what reason?"

"I don't know. Go and ask him. He told me not to harness, so I don't harness. There you are."

"Did he tell you that himself?"

"No, monsieur, it was the innkeeper who gave me the order from him."

"When?"

"Last night when I went to bed."

The three men withdrew, much disturbed.

They asked for Monsieur Follenvie, but the servant replied that monsieur never rose before ten o'clock on account of his asthma.

Indeed, he had expressly forbidden them to wake him earlier, except in case of fire.

They asked to see the officer, but that was absolutely impossible, although he lived at the inn. Monsieur Follenvie alone was authorised to speak to him about civil matters. So they waited. The women went to their rooms and employed themselves in trivial occupations.

Cornudet took his seat in the huge fireplace in the kitchen, where a bright fire was blazing. He called for one of the small tables from the café and a jug of beer; then he produced his pipe, which enjoyed a consideration among democrats almost equal to his own, as if by serving Cornudet it served the country. It was a superb meerschaum pipe, beautifully coloured, black as its owner's teeth; but gracefully curved, sweet-smelling, finely polished, familiar to his touch, and, as it were, the complement of his face. And he sat there like a statue, his eyes sometimes fixed on the fire, sometimes on the foam that crowned his

beer; and after every swallow he passed his long, thin fingers through his long, greasy hair, with a self-satisfied expression, sucking his foam-fringed mustache the while.

Loiseau, on the pretext of taking the stiffness out of his legs, went out to try to sell some wine to the local tradesmen. The count and the manufacturer began to talk politics. They prophesied the future of France. One believed in the Orléans princes, the other in an unknown saviour, a hero who would reveal himself when everything seemed desperate: a Duguesclin or Jeanne d'Arc perhaps, or another Napoleon I. Ah! if the Prince Imperial were not so young! Cornudet, listening to them, smiled like a man who knows the key to the riddle of destiny. His pipe scented the whole kitchen.

As the clock struck ten Monsieur Follenvie appeared. They questioned him without loss of time, but he could do nothing more than repeat these words two or three times, without variation: "The officer, he says like this:

'Monsieur Follenvie, you will forbid their harnessing those travellers' carriage to-morrow. I don't propose that they shall leave here without an order from me. You hear? That will do.'"

Then they insisted upon seeing the officer. The count sent him his card, on which Monsieur Carré-Lamadon wrote his name and all his titles. The Prussian sent word that he would admit those two persons to speak with him when he had breakfasted — that is to say, about one o'clock.

The ladies reappeared, and they ate a little, despite their anxiety. Tallow-Ball seemed ill and terribly perturbed in mind.

They were drinking their coffee when the orderly came to summon the two gentlemen.

Loiseau joined them; but when they tried to take Cornudet along in order to impart more solemnity to their proceedings, he proudly declared that he did not propose ever to hold any communication with the Ger-

mans; and he returned to his chimney-corner and called for another supply of beer.

The three men went up-stairs and were ushered into the best room of the inn, where the officer received them, lying back in an easy-chair, with his feet on the mantel, smoking a long porcelain pipe, and wrapped in a gorgeous dressing-gown, stolen, no doubt, from the abandoned house of some *bourgeois* of execrable taste. He did not rise, did not bow to them, did not look at them. He offered a magnificent specimen of the blackguardism natural to the victorious soldier.

After some moments he finally said:

"What do you want?"

The count was spokesman.

"We wish to continue our journey, monsieur."

"No."

"May I venture to ask the reason of your refusal?"

"Because I don't choose."

"Allow me respectfully to call your atten-

tion, monsieur, to the fact that your commanding general gave us a permit to proceed to Dieppe; and I do not think that we have done anything to deserve harsh treatment at your hands."

"I don't choose — that's all. You may go down."

The three men bowed and withdrew.

The afternoon was dreary enough. They were utterly unable to understand that Germanic caprice, and the strangest ideas passed through their minds. They all remained in the kitchen and discussed the situation endlessly, imagining the most improbable things. Perhaps he proposed to detain them as hostages; but to what end?—or to hold them as prisoners; or, more probably, to demand a heavy ransom for them. At that thought they were panic-stricken. The richest were the most terrified, already fancying themselves compelled to empty bags of gold into that arrogant soldier's hands, in order to redeem their lives. They cudgelled their

brains to invent plausible falsehoods, ways of concealing their wealth — of representing themselves as poor, very poor. Loiseau took off his watch-chain and put it in his pocket. The approach of night increased their alarm. The lamp was lighted, and, as they still had two hours before dinner, Madame Loiseau proposed a game of *trente-et-un*. That would distract their thoughts. The suggestion was accepted. Even Cornudet, having laid aside his pipe for courtesy's sake, joined the game.

The count shuffled the cards and dealt. Tallow-Ball had thirty-one at the outset; and the excitement of the game soon allayed the fear that oppressed their hearts. But Cornudet noticed that the Loiseaus were in accord to cheat.

As they were about to sit down to dinner, Monsieur Follenvie appeared and announced in his asthmatic voice: "The Prussian officer sends me to ask Mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset if she has changed her mind."

Tallow-Ball was still on her feet, pale as death. Then, suddenly turning crimson, she was suffocated by such a paroxysm of rage that she could not speak. At last she burst out: "You may tell that beast, that dirty wretch, that carrion of a Prussian, that I will never do what he wishes; you understand? never, never, never!"

The bulky innkeeper left the room. Thereupon Tallow-Ball was surrounded, questioned, entreated by all the others to disclose the mystery of her visit. She refused at first; but anger soon carried the day.

"What does he want? what does he want? He wants me for his mistress!" she shrieked.

Nobody took offence at the words, the general indignation was so intense. Cornudet broke his glass by bringing it down violently on the table. There was a chorus of reprobation against that low-minded trooper, a tempest of wrath, a general compact of resistance, as if he had demanded of each

one a portion of the sacrifice demanded of her. The count declared in a tone of disgust that those fellows acted after the manner of the ancient barbarians. The women, especially, manifested the most violent and caressing compassion for Tallow-Ball. The sisters of charity, who appeared only at meals, lowered their eyes and said nothing.

They dined none the less when the first outburst of rage had subsided; but they talked very little — they reflected.

The ladies retired early; and the men, while they smoked, organised a game of écarté, which they invited Monsieur Follenvie to join, intending to question him shrewdly as to the best means to employ to overcome the officer's resistance. But he was engrossed by his cards; he refused to listen or to reply, but kept repeating: "Attend to the game, messieurs, attend to the game." His faculties were so absorbed that he forgot to expectorate, the result being an occasional explosion in his chest. His whistling lungs played the

whole asthmatic scale, from the low, deep notes to the shrill, hoarse cry of a rooster trying to crow.

He even refused to go up-stairs when his wife, who was nodding with sleep, came to fetch him. So she went away alone; for she was "a morning bird," always up with the sun, whereas her man was "a night bird," always ready to sit up all night with friends. He called after her: "Put my egg-nogg in front of the fire"; and continued his game. When they saw that they could extract nothing from him, they declared that it was time to say good-night, and they all went to bed.

They rose quite early again the next morning, with a vague hope, a still more intense desire to be gone, a feeling of horror at the thought of passing another day in that wretched little inn.

Alas! the horses remained in the stable, the driver was still invisible. Having nothing to do, they hovered about the diligence.

The breakfast was a most melancholy occasion; and a sort of coldness toward Tallow-Ball had sprung up; for the night, which brings counsel, had modified their opinions to some extent. They were almost angry with the girl now for not having gone to the Prussian secretly, in order to afford her companions a pleasant surprise when they awoke. What could be more simple? Who would have known anything about it? She could have saved appearances by sending word to the officer that she was moved to pity by their distress. To her it was a matter of so little importance.

But nobody avowed such thoughts as yet.

In the afternoon, when they were almost bored to death, the count proposed a walk in the outskirts of the village. They wrapped themselves up carefully and the little party set forth, with the exception of Cornudet, who preferred to remain by the fire, and the two nuns, who passed their time at the church or with the curé.

The cold, which grew more intense from day to day, stung the noses and ears cruelly; their feet ached, so that every step was a torment; and when the open country appeared, it looked so desolate with its boundless expanse of white, that they turned at once, their brains benumbed and a heavy weight on their hearts.

The four women walked ahead, the three men followed, a little in the rear.

Loiseau, who understood the situation, suddenly asked if "that hussy" was going to keep them in such a hole much longer. The count, always courtly, said that they could not demand such a painful sacrifice of a woman, and that it must come from herself. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon remarked that if the French should make, as had been suggested, an offensive movement by way of Dieppe, the opposing forces must inevitably meet at Tôtes. This reflection made the other two thoughtful.

"Suppose we should escape on foot?" said Loiseau.

The count shrugged his shoulders. "Can you think of such a thing, in this snow, with our wives? And then we should be pursued at once, overtaken in ten minutes, and brought back as prisoners at the mercy of the soldiers."

That was true; nothing more was said.

The ladies talked of dresses, but a certain constraint seemed to keep them apart.

Suddenly, at the end of the street, the officer appeared. His tall, wasplike, uniformed figure stood out against the snow on the horizon, and he walked with his knees apart, with the motion peculiar to soldiers, who try not to mar their carefully polished boots.

He bowed as he passed the ladies, and glanced scornfully at the men, who had enough dignity not to remove their hats, although Loiseau made a movement to do so.

Tallow-Ball flushed to the ears; and the three married women felt woefully humiliated to be met by that soldier in the company of the girl whom he had treated so unceremoniously.

Thereupon they began to talk about him, his manners, and his features. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who had known many officers, and who judged them as an expert, declared that he was not at all bad-looking; indeed, she regretted that he was not French, because he would have made a very smart hussar, upon whom all the women would certainly dote.

Returned to the inn, they did not know what to do. Sharp words were exchanged concerning trivial matters. The silent dinner lasted a very short time, and they went up to bed, hoping to kill time in sleep.

They came down-stairs the next morning with tired faces and angry hearts. The women hardly spoke to Tallow-Ball.

A bell rang. It was for a baptism. The stout girl had a child being brought up by some peasants at Yvetot. She did not see him once a year, and never thought of him; but the thought of the child about to be baptised sent into her heart a sudden wave of

violent affection for her own, and she determined to be present at the ceremony.

As soon as she had gone, the others all looked at one another; then they drew their chairs together, for they must come to some decision sooner or later. Loiseau had an inspiration; he suggested that they should propose to the officer to detain Tallow-Ball alone, and to let the others go.

Monsieur Follenvie undertook to carry the message, but he came down again almost immediately. The German, who knew human nature, had shown him the door. He proposed to detain the whole party as long as his desire was not gratified.

Thereupon Madame Loiseau's vulgar nature made itself manifest.

"Well, we 're not going to die of old age here. As it 's that hussy's trade to act so with all men, I don't consider that she has any right to refuse one more than another. Just let me tell you that she accepted in Rouen any lovers she could find, even coach-

men! Yes, madame, the coachman at the prefecture! I know all about it, for he buys his wine of us. And to-day, when it 's a question of helping us out of a scrape, she plays the prude! For my part, I think that the officer is behaving very well. He may have been fasting a long time; and there were three of us here whom he would have preferred, no doubt. But no, he is content to take the one who belongs to everybody. He respects us married women. Just remember that he is the master. He had only to say: 'It is my will'; and he could have taken us by force, with his soldiers."

The other two women shuddered. Pretty Madame Carré-Lamadon's eyes gleamed, and she turned slightly pale, as if she were being taken forcibly by the officer.

The men, who were discussing the question apart, joined the ladies. Loiseau, frantic with rage, was in favour of handing that wretch over to the enemy, bound hand and foot. But the count, descended from three

generations of ambassadors, and endowed with the physique of a diplomatist, was an advocate of skillful management.

"We must persuade her," he said.

Thereupon they conspired.

The women put their heads closer together, they lowered their voices, and the discussion became general, each one giving his or her opinion. It was all very proper, however. The ladies, especially, discovered the most delicate turns of expression, the most charming refinements of language in which to say the most indecorous things. A foreigner would not have understood, their precautions were so carefully observed. But as the thin layer of modesty with which every woman of the world is covered does not go below the surface, they revelled in that offensive episode, wildly enjoying themselves at heart, feeling in their element, dabbling in illicit love with the sensual delight of one gourmand cook preparing supper for another. Gaiety returned of its own motion, the incident seemed so

amusing to them at the last. The count indulged in some rather *risqué* jests, but they were delivered so gracefully that they were greeted with a smile. Loiseau in his turn emitted some less refined ribaldry, at which none took offence; and the thought brutally expressed by his wife was uppermost in all minds: "As it 's that creature's trade, why should she refuse him any more than another?" Pretty Madame Carré-Lamadon seemed to think that if she were in her place she would be less inclined to refuse him than another.

They prepared the siege in detail, as if they were about to invest a fortress. They agreed what rôle each one was to assume, with what arguments it was to be supported, and what manœuvres each one was to execute. They concerted the plan of attack, the stratagems to be employed, and the unexpected assaults to force that living citadel to admit the enemy.

Cornudet meanwhile held aloof, taking absolutely no part in the business.

Their profound attention to their schemes

so engrossed their minds that they did not hear Tallow-Ball come in. But the count breathed a faint "Hush!" which made them all raise their eyes. She was in the room. They abruptly ceased talking, and a sort of constraint prevented them from speaking to her at first. The countess, who was more versed than the others in the duplicity of fashionable salons, questioned her:

"Was the baptism interesting?"

The stout girl, still deeply moved, described it all — the faces, the attitudes, and even the appearance of the church. She added:

"It is so good to pray sometimes!"

Until the luncheon hour, however, the ladies were content to be amiable to her, in order to increase her confidence and to make her more submissive to their advice.

As soon as they were at table they opened their approaches. At first there was a vague conversation concerning self-sacrifice. They cited examples from ancient times: Judith and Holofernes; then, without transition,

Lucrece with Sextus, and Cleopatra admitting to her bed all the generals of the enemy and reducing them to slavish subjection. Then followed an apocryphal story, born in the imagination of those ignorant millionaires, wherein the women of Rome lulled Hannibal to sleep in their arms at Capua, and with him his lieutenants and the legions of the mercenaries. They mentioned all the women who had checked the advance of conquerors, made of their bodies a battle-field, a means of subduing their foes, a weapon; the women who had vanquished by their heroic caresses hideous or abhorred beings, and had sacrificed their chastity in the interest of vengeance and patriotism.

And all these things were told in a decent and subdued fashion, with an occasional burst of artificial enthusiasm calculated to arouse emulation. In fact, one would have thought that the sole mission of woman on this earth is to make a never-ending sacrifice of her person to the caprices of foreign soldiery.

The two nuns seemed not to hear, being absorbed in deep thought. Tallow-Ball said nothing.

They gave her the whole afternoon for reflection. But, instead of calling her "madame," as they had previously done, they said "mademoiselle" simply, not one of them knew why, as if they proposed to make her descend a step on the ladder of esteem that she had scaled, to make her feel her position.

As the soup was served, Monsieur Follenvie reappeared, repeating his sentence of the night before:

"The Prussian officer sends me to ask Mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset if she has changed her mind yet."

Tallow-Ball replied curtly: "No, monsieur."

But during dinner the coalition weakened. Loiseau made three unlucky remarks. They were all cudgelling their brains to discover new examples, without avail, when the countess, without premeditation perhaps, impelled

by a vague desire to do homage to religion, questioned the elder of the nuns concerning the great deeds in the lives of the saints. Now many of them were guilty of acts which would be crimes in our eyes; but the Church readily gives absolution for such crimes when they are committed for the glory of God or for the good of one's neighbour. That was a potent argument and the countess made the most of it. Thereupon, whether by virtue of one of those tacit understandings, one of those secret acts of complaisance in which every one excels who wears an ecclesiastical garment, or simply as a result of lucky blundering, of obliging stupidity, the old nun brought formidable reinforcements to the plot. They thought her timid: she showed herself to be bold, loquacious, and violent. She was not disturbed by the gropings of casuistry; her doctrine seemed a bar of iron; her faith never wavered; her conscience knew no scruples. In her eyes the sacrifice of Abraham was perfectly natural, for she would have

killed father and mother instantly at a command from on high; and nothing, in her opinion, could offend the Lord, when the ultimate purpose was laudable. The countess, making the most of the consecrated authority of her unexpected confederate, led her on to put forth, as it were, an edifying paraphrase of the moral axiom: "The end justifies the means."

She questioned her.

"And so, my sister, you believe that God accepts all methods, and pardons the act when the motive is pure?"

"Who can doubt it, madame? An act blameworthy in itself often becomes meritorious by virtue of the thought that inspires it."

And they went on thus, interpreting the will of God, predicting His judgments, representing Him as interested in matters which, in reality, hardly concern Him.

All this was carefully enveloped in adroit and discreet phrases. But every word of the

sanctified creature in a hood made a breach in the courtesan's indignant resistance. Then, the conversation assuming a slightly different turn, the woman with the dangling rosary spoke of the houses of her order, of her superior, of herself, and of her little neighbour, dear Sister Ste.-Nicéphore. They had been summoned to Havre, to nurse hundreds of soldiers sick with smallpox in the hospitals. She pictured the condition of those poor wretches, described their disease in detail. And while they two were detained on the road by that Prussian's whim, a large number might be dying, whom they perhaps could have saved! That was her specialty, nursing soldiers; she had been in the Crimea, in Italy, in Austria; and as she described her campaigns she suddenly stood revealed as one of those drum-and-trumpet nuns who seem created to follow camps, to pick up the wounded in the eddies of battle, and to subdue with a word the great undisciplined troopers more successfully than their officers; a genuine Sister Rub-a-dub,

whose wrinkled face, riddled with numberless holes, seemed an image of war's devastation.

No one spoke after her, the effect of what she had said seemed so favourable.

As soon as the meal was at an end, they went to their rooms, and did not appear again until quite late the next forenoon.

The luncheon passed off quietly. They were giving the seed sown the night before time to sprout and to bear fruit.

In the afternoon the countess proposed a walk; thereupon the count, as they had agreed, took Tallow-Ball's arm, and fell behind the rest with her.

He talked to her in the familiar, fatherly, somewhat contemptuous tone which men of assured position adopt with women of her class, calling her "my dear child," speaking down to her from the eminence of his social position, of his indisputable distinction. He went at once to the heart of the question.

"So you prefer to keep us here, exposed, like yourself, to all the violent measures which

would follow a defeat of the Prussian troops, rather than to consent to oblige, as you have done so often in your life?"

Tallow-Ball made no reply.

He attacked her by gentleness, by argument, by sentiment. He had the art to remain "monsieur count," gallant when the occasion required, complimentary — in a word, amiable. He dwelt upon the service which she would render them, and spoke of their gratitude; then abruptly added, laughingly adopting the familiar *tu:* "And you know, my dear, he will be able to boast of having known such a pretty girl as he won't often find in his own country."

Tallow-Ball did not reply, but joined the ladies.

When they returned to the inn, she went to her room at once, and did not appear again. The disquietude of the others was extreme. What was she going to do? If she should still refuse, how embarrassing it would be!

The clock struck the dinner-hour. They awaited her in vain. At last Monsieur Follenvie appeared, and announced that Mademoiselle Rousset was indisposed, and that they could dine without her. They all pricked up their ears. The count approached the innkeeper and asked him in an undertone: "Is it all right?"—"Yes." Out of deference to the proprieties, he did not say anything to his companions, but simply moved his head slightly. Instantly a long-drawn sigh of relief issued from every breast, and a joyous expression appeared on their faces. Loiseau exclaimed: "*Saperlipopette!* I will treat to champagne, if there's any in the establishment." And Madame Loiseau had a terrible pang when the proprietor returned with four bottles in his hands. Every one had suddenly become talkative and noisy; a naughty joy filled all their hearts. The count seemed to discover that Madame Carré-Lamadon was fascinating, and the manufacturer paid compliments to the countess.

The conversation was animated, playful, replete with sallies.

Although these sallies were in the most execrable taste, they amused the company and offended none; for indignation, like everything else, depends on one's surroundings, and the atmosphere which had gradually formed about them was charged with gross imaginings.

At dessert, even the ladies made witty and veiled allusions. Eyes gleamed; they had drunk freely. The count, who retained his external aspect of profound gravity even in his divagations, suggested a comparison, which was much applauded, concerning the end of winter-quarters at the Pole, and the joy of the beleaguered sailors when they see a southward passage open before them.

Loiseau, being fairly started, rose with a glass of champagne in his hand.

"I drink to our deliverance."

They were all on their feet in an instant; they applauded him. Even the two sisters, at the solicitation of the ladies, consented to

dip their lips in the foaming wine, which they had never tasted. They declared that it resembled aerated lemonade, but that it was more delicate.

Loiseau summed up the situation.

"It 's too bad we have n't a piano, for we might dance a quadrille."

Cornudet had not said a word or made a motion; he seemed absorbed in very serious thoughts, and at times tugged at his long beard with a fierce gesture, as if he were trying to make it even longer. At last, towards midnight, when they were about to separate, Loiseau, who was unsteady on his legs, suddenly tapped him on the stomach, and said, amid hiccoughs: "You 're not lively to-night; you don't say anything, citizen!" Whereupon Cornudet abruptly raised his head and exclaimed, embracing the whole company in a flashing and terrible glance: "I tell you all that you have done an infamous thing!" He arose, stalked to the door, repeated, "An infamous thing!" and vanished.

That was like a cold blast at first. Loiseau was disconcerted and cut a foolish figure; but he recovered his assurance, and suddenly began to writhe with laughter, saying: "They are too fresh, old fellow, they 're too fresh!" As no one understood him, he told them about "the mysteries of the corridor." Thereupon there was a renewed outburst of merriment. The ladies laughed like madwomen. The count and Monsieur Carré-Lamadon laughed until they cried. They could not believe it.

"What? You are sure? He tried——"

"I tell you that I saw."

"And she refused ——"

"Because the Prussian was in the next room."

"It is n't possible."

"I swear that it 's true."

The count fairly choked. The manufacturer held his sides with both hands. Loiseau continued:

"And to-night, you understand, he does n't think it amusing, not at all."

And all three roared again, exhausted, breathless, coughing.

With that they separated. But Madame Loiseau, whose nature was like that of the nettle, observed to her husband as they retired, that that "little hussy" of a Carré-Lamadon's laugh had been forced all the evening. "Those women, you know, when they like men in uniform, it makes no differference to them, I tell you, whether the uniform is French or Prussian. Lord God! if it is n't a shame!"

The next day a bright winter sun made the snow dazzling white. The diligence, harnessed at last, stood waiting in front of the door, while an army of white pigeons, puffing out their thick plumage, their pink eyes marked with a black spot in the centre, hopped gravely between the legs of the six horses, seeking their sustenance in the smoking dung that they dropped.

The driver, wrapped in his sheepskin coat, was on the box, puffing at a pipe, and all the

travellers, radiant with satisfaction, attended to the hasty preparation of supplies for the rest of the journey.

They were waiting for Tallow-Ball. She appeared. She seemed a little confused, shamefaced; and she walked timidly towards her travelling-companions, all of whom, with a simultaneous movement, turned their backs as if they had not seen her. The count with much dignity took his wife's arm and led her away from that impure neighbourhood.

The stout girl halted, utterly amazed; then, summoning all her courage, she accosted the manufacturer's wife with a "Good-morning, madame," murmured in the humblest of tones. The other with her head alone, gave an impertinent little salutation, accompanied by a glance of outraged virtue. Everybody seemed very much occupied, and they held aloof from her as if she bore contagion in her skirts. Then they hurried towards the carriage, where she arrived last of all, alone, and silently

resumed the seat she had occupied during the first part of the journey.

They seemed not to see her, not to know her; but Madame Loiseau, staring at her indignantly from afar, said to her husband, half aloud:

"Luckily I am not beside her."

The heavy vehicle started, and the journey began anew.

At first nobody spoke. Tallow-Ball dared not raise her eyes. She felt indignant with her neighbours, and at the same time humiliated because she had yielded, because she was sullied by the kisses of that Prussian into whose arms they had hypocritically cast her.

But the countess soon broke that painful silence; turning to Madame Carré-Lamadon, she said:

"You know Madame d'Étrelles, I think?"

"Yes, she is one of my friends."

"What a charming woman!"

"Enchanting! A truly exceptional nature; extremely well-informed too, and an artist

to her finger-tips; she sings deliciously and draws to perfection."

The manufacturer was talking with the count, and amid the rattling of the windows a word sometimes made itself heard:

"Coupons — maturity — premium — time loan."

Loiseau, who had filched from the inn the old pack of cards, soiled by five years of rubbing on poorly wiped tables, attacked a game of bezique with his wife.

The sisters took the long rosaries that hung from their girdles, made the sign of the cross in unison, and suddenly their lips began to move swiftly, constantly increasing their speed, hurrying their indistinct murmur as if they were running a race with their *oremus;* and from time to time they kissed a medallion, or crossed themselves again, then resumed their rapid, incessant mumbling.

Cornudet sat perfectly still, thinking.

After three hours on the road, Loiseau picked up the cards.—"It is hungry," he said.

Thereupon his wife produced a package tied with string, from which she took a piece of cold veal. She carved it neatly in thin, solid slices, and they began to eat.

"Suppose we follow suit," said the countess. The others assented and she unpacked the provisions prepared for the two families. They were in one of those long vessels, on the lid of which there is a porcelain hare, to signify that a hare-pie lies beneath — an appetising dish, with white strips of pork drawn through the dark flesh of the game, with which other meats chopped fine were mingled. A handsome slice of Gruyère cheese, brought in a piece of newspaper, retained the imprint, *Faits Divers,* on its oily surface.

The two nuns produced a piece of sausage, redolent of garlic; and Cornudet, burying both hands at the same time in the enormous pockets of his overcoat, took from one four hard-boiled eggs, and from the other a crust of bread. He removed the shells, threw

them in the straw under his feet, and began to bite into the eggs, dropping bright yellow morsels into his enormous beard, where they shone like stars.

Tallow-Ball, in the haste and excitement of her rising, had been unable to think of anything; and she was suffocated with rage, exasperated beyond words, as she watched all those people tranquilly eating. A wave of tumultuous passion swept over her at first, and she opened her mouth to shriek the truth at them, with a stream of insults which came to her lips; but she could not speak, her wrath choked her so.

No one glanced at her, no one gave her a thought. She felt as if she were drowned in the scorn of those virtuous knaves, who had just sacrificed her, then cast her aside as an unclean and useless thing. Then she thought of her great basket, full of good things which they had devoured like gluttons: her two chickens glistening with jelly, her pies, her pears, and her four bottles of claret; and,

her rage suddenly subsiding, as a string breaks when stretched too far, she felt that she was on the point of weeping. She made superhuman efforts, stiffened herself, swallowed her sobs, as children do; but the tears rose, glistened on the edge of her eyelids; and soon two great fellows left her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks. Others followed more rapidly, like drops of water oozing from a cliff, and fell regularly on the full curve of her breast. She sat upright, looking straight ahead with a pale, set face, hoping that they would not see her.

But the countess noticed her condition and called her husband's attention with a gesture. He shrugged his shoulders, as if to say: "What would you have? it is not my fault."

Madame Loiseau indulged in a silent laugh of triumph, and muttered:

"She is weeping over her shame."

The two sisters had returned to their prayers, after wrapping the rest of their sausage in a paper.

Cornudet, who was digesting his eggs, stretched his long legs under the opposite seat, threw himself back, folded his arms, smiled like a man who had first thought of a good joke, and began to whistle the *Marseillaise.*

Every face darkened. The popular song evidently did not please his neighbours. They became nervous, irritated, and looked as if they were all ready to howl, as dogs do when they hear a hurdy-gurdy. He noticed it, but he did not stop. Sometimes he even hummed the words:

"Amour sacré de la patrie,
Conduis, soutiens nos bras vengeurs;
Liberté, liberté, chéries,
Combats avec tes défenseurs!"

They travelled more swiftly, the snow being harder; and all the way to Dieppe, during the long, dull hours of the journey, while they jolted over the ruts in the gathering darkness, and when the carriage was

pitch-dark, he continued, with savage persistency, his monotonous, vindictive whistling, forcing their weary and exasperated minds to follow the tune from end to end, to recall all the words and to fit them to each measure.

And Tallow-Ball wept on; and at times a sob, which she could not restrain, made itself heard in the darkness, between two bars of the tune.

1880.